

Commonsense
about
Examinations

AMRIK SINGH

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COMMONSENSE ABOUT EXAMINATIONS

Lectures delivered at Banaras Hindu University 1984

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AMRIK SINGH



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To the memory of my father
Who, both through precept and example, taught me
That before one can be exacting with others,
One has to be exacting with one's self.

PREFACE

When I was invited by Banaras Hindu University (BHU) to deliver a series of lectures which would also be eventually published, it was open to me to speak on a subject of my choice. I decided to speak on the subject of examinations. This is an issue about which everyone feels deeply concerned. Examinations are at the heart of the academic process. Our understanding of this process however has got distorted because we have made the mistake of failing to understand what comes first and what comes next. This is why I have chosen to entitle these lectures Commonsense about Examinations.

I have tried to argue in these lectures that one reason for our having failed so far to solve the problem is that we did not go about it in the right way. The problem is not only of examinations. The problem is how to ensure that effective learning takes place. Teaching is a crucial input and so is testing. Both of them have a bearing on learning. The key issue, however, is learning and that should never be forgotten. During the last few decades we have put all the emphasis on testing and how to improve it and make it more valid and reliable, but very little has been said or done in regard to teaching and learning. In consequence, we have neither been able to ensure good learning nor good testing.

In order to build up my argument, it has been necessary to go over some of the important moves made in recent years. In particular, I have discussed the Plan of Action put forward by the Ministry of Education and the UGC in 1972 in some detail. As I see it, this Plan did not help matters. It attempted to replace the existing system of assessment altogether but, as could have been anticipated, we neither succeeded in displacing the old system nor in implanting a new one. As a result, the system followed over the years has become even more dysfunctional than before.

It is only very recently that the search for an 'ideal' solution was abandoned, and that, too, somewhat reluctantly. No one can dispute the proposition that it is the teacher who can judge best how good a particular student is or otherwise. What is to be done, however, if this ideal set of circumstances does not exist or can-

not be created? Nobody has stopped to investigate this question in practical terms and the situation has thus drifted from worse to disaster.

Put bluntly, the malady required one line of treatment but those who were in a position to decide preferred another line. The details of this are dealt with in the body of the lectures. All that needs to be said here is that the situation today is much more unsatisfactory than it ever was. Whether the system has virtually broken down or not depends upon how one looks at the problem and whether one is willing to face facts.

Having shown the weakness of the solution offered in the Plan of Action, I have shown through the internal evidence of UGC documents how the UGC has shifted its position and has now adopted what is called the Minimum Programme. This Programme has far better chances of success, provided it is pushed through with the necessary commitment and dynamism. I have also gone into the process of reasoning which led the UGC to re-think its earlier stand and adopt a position which is more likely to succeed.

It is ironical that of the three important recommendations made by the Plan of Action, one (grading instead of marks) was pushed more vigorously than the others. Internal assessment on which so much emphasis was laid in the Plan, was allowed to fade out more or less as a non-starter. The third recommendation related to question banking. This was not pushed at all by the UGC, and yet it has had some measure of success. As I intend to show in the course of these lectures, question banking is more attuned to the kind of teaching and learning that takes place in our educational institutions than anything else that can be thought of. In the eyes of some people it is an attempt to short-circuit the process of learning. The fact of the matter is that it is a useful and, in our situation, a workable pedagogic device to regulate and quicken the process of learning. Not only that, it has also the potential of significantly changing the mode and method of our examinations.

All these years most teachers have been fed on the belief that the salvation of higher education lies in adopting internal assessment in preference to external examinations. I have tried to combat this notion. In my opinion, this kind of polarization is not the right way of posing the problem. It is not a question of choosing internal assessment in place of external examinations or

✓ vice-versa. Internal assessment is a highly desirable practice wherever it can work. However, the Education Commission (1964-6) had cautioned against combining the score of internal assessment ✓ with external assessment in a mechanical fashion. Despite this caution, mistakes have continued to be made. But that is another story.

✓ Regarding internal assessment, to which most enlightened academics feel committed, two important points need to be made. One is in regard to the use of the term 'internal assessment'. This description seeks to project some kind of a dichotomy between ✓ internal and external assessment. There is, in fact, no basic dichotomy between the two. Internal assessment seeks to assess one set of abilities and external assessment another. In order to assess a student properly, both the abilities have to be assessed in a manner that is at once scientifically valid and reliable.

✓ The essay-type questions which are set in most universities test a student's depth of knowledge and range of understanding. The student is enabled to argue his point of view, adduce and organize ✓ evidence for it and make out a cogent case. But there is a whole set of other abilities which cannot be tested through this ✓ mode of testing. These are no less important and are as relevant to the process of learning. How is one to test a student's initiative, ✓ quickness of judgement, habits of systematic work and a whole range of other skills? The essay-type examinations are not the ✓ appropriate mechanism for this. These can be done best of all through close interaction between student and teacher, which is ✓ why internal assessment is regarded as more suitable for the purpose.

✓ Not only that, external examinations are conducted at best once a year. To conduct them more often is far from feasible. In the ✓ course of academic interaction, student-teacher contact takes place all the time. The teacher alone is in a position to judge at what pace the student is working and how well he is learning. Above all, the teacher can always find out how thorough and meticulous a student is. The correct term to use, therefore, should be continuous ✓ assessment. Because of the way we view the problem (external versus internal), we call it internal assessment. Unless this shift in understanding takes place, a faulty perception will continue to falsify our understanding of the problem.

The second issue is related to the fact that continuous assess-

✓ ment has to be done by the teacher concerned. How competent and upright he is are questions that are central to the entire operation of assessment, therefore. They are equally relevant in the case of external examinations but not quite as central. The external examination is an anonymous operation. The examiner never gets to know the identity of the examinee. So whether he is competent or less than competent affects everyone equally. In the case ✓ of a face-to-face encounter, the personal factor becomes much more obtrusive as well as weighty than it is otherwise. To cut a long story short, most of those academics who swear by internal assessment fail to come to grips with the consequences of what is to be done when the norms of probity are not what they are expected to be.

It is unnecessary here to discuss the reasons for the very wide variations in this regard. In certain institutions a kind of culture has grown up where the concerned individuals feel that they are answerable to one another. When assessment is done by those individuals in that set-up, the chances of the teacher acting subjectively or erratically are few. But this cannot be said about 99 per cent of the institutions in India. This is the principal reason for the emphasis on internal assessment in the Plan of Action appearing wrong to me.

The system of higher education in India being what it is (the affiliating system and its concomitant, the external examination), if a plan of reform (such as the Plan of Action) does not touch the basic problem, it should be regarded as suspect. The bulk of the students (whatever be the percentage—90 or 99 per cent) are examined through the system of external examinations. Unless an answer can be found to their problem, it is meaningless to talk of a Plan of Action. One cannot help saying that most high-powered bodies of experts in India discuss these problems in such a manner as to suggest that, though they may be resident in India, their heart is elsewhere. What they propose does not always bear much relation to the reality on the ground.

In any case, one thing that they usually overlook is that no academic innovation can be introduced unless, at the same time, one goes into the question of how that innovation is to be worked. That immediately leads to the question of what kind of teachers today man the system of education and what is the ethos of work in which they function. These issues cannot be considered

while discussing the issue of examination reform. At the same time, one cannot meaningfully talk of any innovation without taking into account what kind of persons are to implement those innovations. Instruments of implementation are no less important than policies or programmes.

It is because of this refusal to face the reality that one distrusts attempts at changing the system altogether. The reality is that, howsoever one may object to it, the system of affiliating colleges to universities is by now deeply rooted in the Indian psyche. The system of external examinations is very much a part of the affiliating system. In order to do away with external examinations it is the affiliating system itself which would have to be changed. Attempts to do so have not succeeded so far. It is only after this has been done that the system of assessment can be changed. We are thus stuck with the system as it has evolved over the years. This is not to suggest that I would not like the system to change. What I am not so sure about is that the requisite momentum for change can come *only* from within the educational system.

My line of argument should not be taken to be a plea for perpetuating the existing system. I have not, in fact, even discussed the system of public examination in any detail. But once it is recognized that, in terms of the Minimum Programme adopted by the UGC in 1982, the existing system of external examinations stays, certain consequences follow. These have been discussed in the course of the lectures only by implication. In particular I have not gone into the questions of (a) the need for decentralization, (b) frequency of examinations, (c) issues relating to examining scripts, random sampling and scaling, and (d) the mechanics of re-evaluation.

These are important issues and have an unmistakeable bearing upon how the existing system can be made to perform better. For one thing, I am not particularly qualified to discuss them. For another, I feel that much more thought has yet to be devoted to them. Once the main thrust of my argument is accepted, these issues can be analysed further by those more competent to deal with them.

In the course of these lectures I am addressing myself primarily to those hundreds and thousands of teachers in India who are involved in higher education. These lectures are being published in the hope that they will reach a much larger audience than it

was my privilege to address at Varanasi. I learnt a good deal from the discussions that followed the lectures. In the light of what was said I have revised several portions of the text. I only hope that the argument is much better ordered now than it was when I delivered the lectures. I have, however, retained the form of address adopted in the lectures as also the polemical tone which went with them.

Finally, it is a pleasure to thank the authorities of BHU, and particularly its Vice-Chancellor, Professor Iqbal Narain, for having invited me to speak at the University. BHU is one of our leading universities. It was a privilege to have been invited to address the members of the teaching community there. I am deeply sensible of the honour done to me and am grateful for it. For my part, I hope, I have responded suitably by choosing a theme which is of interest to all those involved in higher education.

19.6.84

AMRIK SINGH

1 TEACHING-LEARNING-TESTING

It seems appropriate to begin with a quotation from the Report of the Education Commission (1964-6), Discussing the issue of examination reform, the Commission observed.

✓ This is one of those areas in education about which one can say that the problem is known, its significance is realized, the broad lines of the solution—at least to begin with—are known; but for some reason or other an effort to implement it on any worthwhile scale or in a meaningful manner has not yet been made. What is needed is vigorous and sustained action.

This was observed in 1966. In another couple of years it will be exactly two decades since these remarks were made. Very little however has been done in the course of the two decades to improve matters and today the situation remains approximately as it was when these remarks were made. Indeed, the situation is more difficult now, for a problem, if unsolved for a long span of time, becomes even more difficult to solve. This is precisely what seems to have happened in the case of examination reform.

In such a situation it would be too much to claim that in discussing the problem I am making a contribution to what is called 'vigorous and sustained action'. The forum for that is different and, if I may say, it is spread all over India in every educational institution. But I feel that one reason why no vigorous action has been taken on a whole body of recommendations made by the Education Commission and several other high-powered bodies is that, to some extent, we have gone about it the wrong way. Let me hasten to explain myself.

✓ Dissatisfaction with examinations is not a recent phenomenon. More than a century ago, in 1871, the first protest was made by the Principal of a Calcutta college. The issue was discussed in the 1882 Report of the Indian Education Commission. The Indian University Commission (1902) had also something to say on the subject and observed: 'The greatest evil from which university education in India suffers is that teaching is subordinated to examinations and not examinations to teaching.' More or less

the same point was made by the Calcutta University Commission in 1919. In fact, hardly any body of experts has not commented adversely on the system of examinations that prevails in the country. There is also the well-known remark of the Radhakrishnan Commission in 1950: 'We are convinced that if we are to suggest any single reform in university education it would be that of examinations.'

This particular remark of the Radhakrishnan Commission has been repeatedly quoted. In my opinion, it has done a disservice to higher education in the country. It seems to suggest that examination reform is the key problem in higher education and implies that once that is tackled, performance in education as a whole will improve. But this is to see the problem in isolation from its wider context. Examinations, as anyone can see, seek to test what a student has learnt. What a student has learnt, therefore, is of paramount importance. It can be no one's contention that examinations should not be improved. But it is an inversion of priorities to put the entire emphasis on making examinations more objective, more valid and more reliable, and not at the same time dwell on the inadequacies and defects of the current modes of teaching and the importance of more competent learning. The first priority is and should be good and competent learning. It is only after that has been ensured that one can talk of valid and reliable testing.

II

Good examinations are like good quality-control mechanisms in a production unit. Quality control is necessary and without it there is no way of knowing whether production is satisfactory and of the required standard. But if the number of rejections is large, it is logical to ask why this is so. Once such a question is asked, it is necessary to go back to each factor that contributes to production. One has to look at the way the material is bought and manufactured. One can even raise questions with regard to the choice of the material and the choice of technology. The whole field is wide open for close scrutiny and there is no question that cannot be asked in regard to the manufacture of a product.

Without quality control the whole process of manufacturing

would be an aggregate of a number of sub-process bereft of close and integral linkage with one another. But quality control is not the only process which needs to be improved, for each of the processes that contribute to the manufacture of a product must be investigated so that we can satisfy ourselves that the inputs are of the required quality and there are no weak linkages. Improved quality control is not a substitute for what goes into the manufacturing of a product. It is the calibre of inputs and the mechanics of manufacture which determine whether the quality will be satisfactory or otherwise. The process of quality control serves to identify merits and demerits, but by itself it cannot improve the quality or the mechanics of manufacturing. Those are independent processes and have to be taken care of independently, even though they are at the same time inter-related. In other words, the autonomy of each process has to be recognized and so has to be its dynamics. In the context of education, the two processes that precede testing are teaching and learning.

III

✓ As a process, learning can take place independently of teaching. So much of what we know in life is self-learnt and has not been taught to us by others. Some individuals have a greater capacity for self-learning than others, but, for the most part, it is safe to recognize that the teacher plays a helpful and medi-✓
atory role. He introduces us to a given body of knowledge. He provides some basic information and he also explains the inter-connections. Having learnt with the help of a teacher or on our own, we go on to integrate it with existing knowledge at our disposal. In the ultimate sense, all education is self-education. Even when we are assisted in the process of learning by someone else, the final test of learning is the extent to which we have internalized what we have learnt. The role of the teacher, as seen from the point of view of the learner, is sometimes crucial and sometimes marginal. So much depends upon the com-
petence of the learner as also his keenness to learn. ✓

It is only after learning has taken place that there can be any question of testing. Testing cannot precede learning. The mistake which we have been making over the years is that we have

been talking of testing as if it were an independent and autonomous function in the academic process rather than the last stage of the trinity of teaching, learning and testing. Following the Radhakrishnan Report it has somehow been assumed that everything would be fine only if we do something about examination reform. But the central issue in our academic situation is not one of examination reform; it is one of ensuring good and competent learning. To the extent that learning cannot take place without skilful and effective teaching, the whole issue of teaching has also to be put on the dissecting table. It is some such recognition of the organic connection between the two which made the Education Commission observe as follows: 'The crippling effect of external examinations on the quality of work and higher education is so great that examination reform has become crucial to all progress and has to go hand in hand with improvements in teaching.'

This statement has the right kind of thrust, except that it is linked with the allegedly crippling effect of external examinations. My contention, as I propose to argue later, is that in talking of the effect of external examinations, the Education Commission is still working within the categories adumbrated by the Radhakrishnan Commission. The condemnation of external examinations has not done us any good. On the contrary, it has identified the wrong kind of target. For decades now we have been firing away at that target and one reason for the present unsatisfactory situation is that the general understanding of the problem has been wrong. This issue will be discussed in greater detail a little later.

IV

Because we have allowed the process of learning to become devitalized and somewhat meaningless in our universities and colleges the situation has reached such a pass that we are more worried about the outcome of our teaching and the mode of the outcome than learning itself. How is it that at the school level hardly anybody chooses to raise this question? Everybody seems satisfied with arrangements at the school level. However, as everybody knows, arrangements at that level are not satisfactory and there is a good deal wrong with the primary and the secondary levels of

✓ education. Whether it is acknowledged or not, nobody chooses to refer to teaching and testing as two distinct processes. At the school level, self-learning is still some distance away and thus all the emphasis is on teaching. What is taught gets tested by the teacher, sometimes in the classroom and sometimes through what is called a promotion examination. Whatever be the details, teaching and testing are not projected as being at the two ends of a pole and both are regarded as being inter-related steps of the larger process.

One explanation for this is that at the lower levels students move from one class to another more or less in terms of a natural progression, and testing is not regarded as an independent operation. Teaching is regarded as important and it is teaching that is done in the classroom. Students are also expected to do a certain amount of homework. This enables them further to assimilate whatever they are being taught and that is how the process of internalization takes place. Without saying anything more about it, I simply wish to underline the integral nature of the two processes without an unnatural attempt to differentiate the two.

The situation begins to change somewhat when students move to the higher secondary stage, where for the first time testing comes to have an importance which it did not have earlier. Indeed, some of the things being said about testing at the undergraduate and the postgraduate levels also become applicable to the higher secondary stage. The nature of the problem is the same as also the nature of the difficulties and it becomes clear that examinations seem a problem when they are de-linked from teaching and learning and it is only then that we start talking of examination reform.

✓ Examinations become a problem to the extent that teaching and learning become deficient or poor in some way. If teaching and learning are satisfactory, trying to assess their depth and effectiveness may be difficult; but it is seen as a problem largely when the earlier stages of teaching and learning have for some reason been rendered ineffective or less than effective. In that situation one starts worrying about testing. In academic and operational terms, this stage of anxiety is described as examination reform.

V

✓ My contention thus is that examination reform becomes an issue in education only when both teaching and learning fall short of the target. This starts happening either when numbers begin to multiply and arrangements are inadequate, or when the quality of teachers begins to get diluted and they are unable to perform as they should, or when the ethos of work degenerates to such an extent that nobody thinks of teaching or learning and everybody thinks of testing and its importance. There can be any number of reasons for this state of affairs, but we are here concerned not with the causes but the consequences. If the consequences of the process at work are that both teaching and learning become unsatisfactory, it usually leads to a greater degree of concern with examinations than otherwise. When the academic process is unhampered, a feeling of intellectual well-being is generated, but if this process is hampered in some way, a sense of anxiety arises as to the outcome and gives rise to the preoccupation with reforming the examination system.

If the expression of this stage of anxiety goes back a century or so, it reflects a sense of concern in regard to what was being accomplished at the college and university level even at that time. There is evidence, to which we have referred already, of dissatisfaction with the way examinations were conducted. My contention is that this dissatisfaction was not so much with the mode of conducting the examination as with the ineffective teaching that was taking place. Signs of this were detected a long time ago, but it was roughly after the first quarter of the twentieth century that the dissatisfaction began to articulate itself repeatedly as well as loudly. One has only to go back to some of the earlier University Inquiry Committee Reports for evidence of this.

By the time the Radhakrishnan Commission reported in 1950, the situation was regarded as sufficiently dismal to be described in the following words by the Commission :

In our visits to the universities we heard, from teachers and students alike, the endless tale of how examinations have become the aim and end of education, how all instruction is subordinated to them, how they kill all initiative in the teacher and the student, how capricious, invalid, unreliable and inadequate they are, and how they tend to corrupt the moral standards of university life.

Surely the situation could not have suddenly deteriorated within two or three years of the departure of the British. Clearly, the situation had been unsatisfactory all these years. In all likelihood the process had gone on for a quarter century or more. That is why the Commission used the words that it did. It was after giving this description of the situation that the Commission went on to state that if we are to suggest one single reform in university education it should be that of the examinations. While diagnosing the problem the Commission and others have almost always attached more importance to the visible symptoms and not to the basic cause of what produces those symptoms. I cannot by any means pretend that before the recent, and not so recent, criticism of examinations was articulated so vehemently that the examinations were conducted in the right way. They were certainly not, and all the objections made against them were valid and proper. A proper analysis of the universities should not merely identify visible symptoms but also attempt to get to the root of the problem.

The root of the problem lies in poor and unsatisfactory teaching carried on year after year and with a certain degree of monotony and sterility. The cumulative impression one is left with is of total dissatisfaction but dissatisfaction with what, that is my question? If dissatisfaction is expressed only with the mode of testing, that, in my opinion, does not go far enough. The basic problem is that students have not learnt all that they were required and expected to learn. Instead of trying to do something about imparting better instruction and ensuring better learning, we instead start questioning the manner in which they are tested, which does not help us tackle the basic problem and improve the situation.

VI

On the basis of what has been quoted from the Radhakrishnan Report, it should be clear that the situation even before 1947 was unsatisfactory. Since then it has got much worse. Amongst the factors that have contributed to the deterioration, the following may be mentioned briefly :

(a) *A phenomenal expansion in numbers.* The fifties and the sixties in particular were decades of unremitting expansion when

the rate of growth of numbers per year was sometimes as high as 13-14 per cent. In no other country of the world has expansion ever taken place at such a breakneck speed. The highest rate of growth in any other country has been 5-6 per cent per year. Even in Nigeria, which is now passing through a phase of remorseless expansion, the rate of expansion (on the basis of somewhat incomplete figures) is expected to be no more than 7-8 per cent per year.

The exceptionally high rate of growth in India had implications in respect of the two inputs which are crucial to any educational operation. Physical facilities have been far from adequate and the availability of the teaching staff of the requisite calibre has failed to keep pace with the demand. In consequence students at every level are much more seriously under-taught today than they were at any stage in earlier decades.

(b) *The medium of instruction.* Even though Indian languages have been introduced as the media of instruction before 1947, the primacy of English was never in doubt. For almost two decades after 1947 there was a planned attempt to introduce Indian languages as the media of instruction. Beginning with the mid-sixties, however, a growing trend in favour of English is recognizable, even though in most Hindi-speaking states the balance is still in favour of Hindi and against English. Taking the country as a whole, almost two-thirds of the students opt for the Indian languages and approximately one-third opt for English. This duality creates certain problems, particularly in respect of availability of textbooks, book collections in the library, the competence of the teaching faculty, etc. Their cumulative impact has been the lowering of standards.

(c) *The rise of student power.* Since the early sixties, if not earlier, student power has been a reality on almost every campus. It is not necessary here to go into the reasons for this, but it should be stated that most student demands tend to be populist in character. Whereas the success of the academic process requires hard and rigorous work, student pressures have been exactly in the opposite direction. The usual demands are for the postponement of examinations, the lowering of standards of admission and pass percentage, the award of grace marks on a generous scale, permission to re-appear as and when convenient and a whole host of similar demands. All these in their total

thrust undermine the academic process, with the result that teaching becomes more and more perfunctory and ineffective. When the date for examinations draws near, students are not ready to sit for them and all kinds of pretexts, legal and not so legal, are found to evade the examination or put it off. In Gujarat, not so long ago, students were permitted to move on to the next class without any examination in utter disregard of the university's regulations. This was challenged and the matter is still pending before the Supreme Court. By the time the judgement is given the matter will be entirely of academic interest, with the students having passed out of educational institutions and entered the world of work. There are so many other instances that can be given, but it is not necessary to do so here.

(d) *Politicalization and permissiveness.* The reference to Gujarat illustrates the extraordinary politicization of universities rather than the mere assertion of student power. In certain cases, as in this one, the two get intertwined. In certain others, the politicization of students and teachers is an independent phenomenon and manifests itself in a variety of ways. For instance, there was the Telengana movement in the early seventies and the J. P. movement in Bihar in 1974-5. Similarly, students have been engaged in political struggle in Assam for a number of years. In all such cases, there is seldom an insistence upon the academic proprieties being observed, the minimum number of lectures being delivered and the required study being put in by students. The imperatives of political agitation are seen to be more urgent than those of academic life.

On the whole, the ethos of work is so lax and, indeed, so permissive in almost all educational institutions, that the academic process gets hurt beyond repair. There is no sanctity attached whatsoever to the importance of teaching and learning. Only the visible expression of it, the process of testing, is regarded as important. In certain cases, e.g. in Bihar during the J. P. agitation, teaching is not done even for 20-30 days, and yet, so as to conform to the cycle of annual examinations, universities decide to conduct them in terms of the schedule specified. This is done in total disregard of what the students were required to do and what they have actually done.

The sorry state of affairs is explicitly recognized in *A Minimum Programme on Examination Reforms* circulated by the UGC to



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the universities in 1982. *Inter-alia*, it says : 'No examination should be held without fulfilling the requirement of a minimum number of lectures/tutorials/laboratory sessions, etc. which should be clearly laid down by the universities.'

(e) *The evil of mass copying.* Till the early sixties the phenomenon was known as the use of unfair means and even though it was recognized that certain individuals might adopt unfair means, this was never described as mass copying. Mass copying is a relatively new phenomenon, and can only occur with the connivance of others connected with examinations—teachers, the invigilation staff, the forces of law and order and whoever else may be involved in the operation. All in some degree or other connive at what is happening, which leads to mass copying. While this particular phenomenon has a good deal to do with the mode of conducting the examination, most academics recognize the fact that it stems from the kind of teaching done in the classroom and the amount of study that students do on their own.

(f) *Deterioration at the postgraduate and research levels.* Almost half the postgraduates in the country today are being produced not by the universities but by the postgraduate colleges. Except for a handful of them, say 40 or 50, the remaining colleges are sub-standard in every sense of the term. Till 1973, the scales of pay in colleges with postgraduate classes were higher than those where undergraduate teaching alone was done. Anyone who wanted a higher scale of pay and was academically ambitious therefore manoeuvred, and almost invariably with success, to get a postgraduate course in his college. Even though this incentive is no longer at work, both for historical and other reasons, a large number of colleges continue to handle postgraduate work. Their equipment and the quality of their staff are distinctly inferior to that available in the universities, even though perhaps one-third of the universities, and possibly more, do not have adequate arrangements for teaching or conducting research.

The quality of those who pass out from these colleges and sub-standard universities thus leaves much to be desired. It is from them that a certain number (till recently it was 10–15 per cent of the total output) go on to undertake university and college teaching. Their own training has been far from rigorous, and when they become teachers, they bring the same values of work and standards of performance to bear upon their function-

ing that they encountered as students. Amongst other factors, this has contributed in no small measure to the sharp decline in the standards of a large number of universities and colleges. Inbreeding is only one of the problems. Equally serious is the fact that those appointed, whether from the same institution or from another, have not been properly and rigorously trained.

(g) *Reduced funding.* As is widely recognized, while other sectors of education have been neglected, higher and professional education have been pampered. This was the situation till a few years ago, but now even higher education is under pressure. This is for a somewhat odd reason! When scales of pay were revised about a decade ago, some increase in the outlay was sanctioned but it fell short of the increase in expenditure. Consequently, the other heads of expenditure, such as the purchase of books and scientific equipment and administrative expenditure, etc. have not received the support that they deserved. Salaries have to be paid in any case, but other items of expenditure are regarded as flexible, with the result that an imbalance over funding has developed and it will be some time before it is redressed.

These are some of the obvious factors that have contributed to the lowering of teaching and learning. Others can also be cited (more notably, the promotion policy, which always emphasized published work and seldom, if ever, took adequate notice of teaching competence). The intention here is not to be comprehensive, but rather, to delineate the context in which teaching and learning take place and to make clear that teaching and learning today are in a much less satisfactory state than ever before in the country. Therefore, to repeat, the most important problem in higher education is not examination reform, but to make teaching and learning more effective and meaningful.

In talking of examination reform we are talking of a problem which by itself is important, no doubt, but in the total context it is not one of the problems that has to be tackled first of all.

VII

Let us briefly but critically review some of the attempts at reform made so far, so that we can draw appropriate conclusions and learn for the future.

We have referred to the diagnosis of the Radhakrishnan

Commission, but it is necessary to provide some further details from it. Having made that oft-quoted statement about examination reform, the Commission went on to observe as follows:

We suggest the introduction of valid, reliable, adequate and objective examinations in the universities of India at the earliest possible time. Without this there is danger that Indian higher education will fall into chaos.

In view of its many advantages we feel that an important and far-reaching improvement in Indian education can be initiated by the introduction of this modern technique of educational measurement and evaluation. . . . But we do not wish to create the impression that objective testing should necessarily rule out the essay-type examination altogether. . . . Objective testing will have to be supplemented by the essay-type examination. It is, therefore, essential to see that the obvious defects of this type are minimized as far as possible.

The essay-type examination which prevails at the degree stage, as elsewhere, suffers from some major defects. It has usually no clearly defined purpose; it is, therefore, invalid. Its sampling is very arbitrary and limited; it is inadequate. Its scoring is subjective and therefore not reliable.

It is a matter of history that hardly anything was done to implement the recommendations made here. The three major outcomes of the Report of the Radhakrishnan Commission were (i) the establishment of the UGC, (ii) the revision of teacher's pay scales and (iii) the introduction of the three-year degree course. Whatever else the Commission had to say, including the suggestions made above, were not acted upon.

In the early fifties, a couple of developments were taking place which strengthened the thrust of what the Radhakrishnan Commission had said. One, a large number of Indian students were going to American universities and coming back after being trained there. The brain drain did not develop into a widespread phenomenon until the sixties and the seventies. During the fifties and the sixties there was considerable expansion in the universities, the research laboratories and in industry. A large number of people who came back after spending a few years at American universities returned with the conviction that the American system of instruction and assessment was distinctly superior to that prevailing in India. From their viewpoint the sooner we switched to that system the better it would be.

Secondly, parallel to this, was the phenomenon of a large

number of American experts coming out to India. Beginning in the early fifties, it became stronger with every succeeding year and only in the early seventies was it to some extent halted. American experts connected with education almost invariably projected their own system of assessment as being the best in the world. While taking place independently, the two phenomena (Indian students going to the U.S.A. and American experts coming to India), supported each other. Interestingly enough, most of the protagonists of examination reform in this period had either been exposed to American practice or were converts to that mode of thinking. It seemed to them that everything would be fine in Indian education only if we adopted the system of internal assessment. In fact, most of the talk of examination reform started with internal assessment and ended with internal assessment. There is a good deal more that can be said on this subject, but let that wait.

VIII

The third outcome of the Radhakrishnan Commission led to further developments of a retrograde kind. As long as there were two examinations to be cleared (intermediate and degree examinations) in four years, the established cycle was an examination every two years. Promotion from the first year to the second and then from the third to the fourth year was a college affair, and the university was not involved. But when a three-year and integrated degree course was introduced a question arose about the spacing of examinations. In some universities an examination was introduced at the end of every year. In others there was an examination at the end of two years, and then the final examination. Perhaps one or two other variations were also tried out, but the total effect was that the number of examinations increased. One has only to look at the work schedule of any examination branch to see how year after year the number of examinations has kept on increasing. In this way, examinations became a substitute for learning and, to some extent, the lever for it.

Why and how did this come to pass? The assumption seemed to be that the only way to ensure that students worked earnestly was to provide for frequent examinations. What went on in the classroom and what the students did in private were not regarded

as important by themselves. Nobody stopped to ask why it was preferable to bring the fear of examination nearer and more imminent to skilful and competent learning. What happened between one examination and another was not important. More than ever before, learning was subordinated to examinations. No wonder it led some people to comment, 'India does not have an educational system. India has only an examination system.'

There was no doubt some dissatisfaction with what was happening. One of the early measures taken by the UGC was to invite Dr Bloom to advise about examinations. The Ministry of Education was also involved in the whole exercise and a Central Evaluation Unit was established in 1958 mainly in respect of secondary education. A number of state governments were also involved and several important steps were taken to put things on a scientific basis. Within the next few years, the school system as a whole was performing better in this respect than the university system. State Evaluation Units had been established in a number of regions and a large number of teachers trained in the new technique of assessment.

While this was happening in the school sector, there was some activity in the university sector too. A number of universities during those years switched over to internal assessment. Those were also the years when the IITs had just been established and agricultural universities were beginning to be established. In these institutions, internal assessment was accepted as the established mode and with strikingly good results. The mainstream universities, however, failed to perform in the desired manner. Within a few years university after university reversed the steps taken.

IX

It was in this context that the Education Commission was appointed in 1964. The Commission made three principal recommendations on the subject of examinations. One was to recommend more frequent assessment so that undue emphasis on the final examination as the sole determinant of success could be reduced. As part of this it also recommended the reform of evaluation techniques. Indeed it also recommended a system of internal assessment as a supplement to external examination. However, the Commission entered a cave at in saying that the results of these in-

ternal assessments should not be mechanically added to the external marks but kept separate, and that both should be shown side by side in the final certificate. Second, it recommended that the UGC set up an examination Reform Unit for higher education at a sufficiently high level so that it could work in collaboration with the universities. Third, the Commission strongly recommended that, even if the existing system of examinations and classifying results was continued, it should be supplemented by mentioning in the same certificate the relative grading of the student on a five point scale.

Seen by themselves, these recommendations cannot be faulted in any significant way. One of the recommendations in particular could have helped the universities to avoid a number of pitfalls. Several universities combined the results of internal assessment with external marking in a mechanical fashion, against which the Commission had warned in no uncertain terms. Not surprisingly, hardly any of these recommendations were acted upon. Curiously, even the UGC did not set up the high-powered body that had been recommended even though the Chairman of the Education Commission continued to be the Chairman of the UGC for six or seven years after the Report was submitted. Was it lack of initiative or of conviction? It is difficult to say.

However, it is likely that, had this step been taken, it could have led to some substantive results; but that was not to be. This state of immobility continued for several years. The Education Commission had underlined the need for vigorous and sustained action. But there was no vigorous or sustained action. The rate of expansion kept up its relentless march and there was little time for attending to other programmes. It was about this period that the Public Accounts Committee said that, even when funds had been provided for Quality Improvement Programmes, the UGC did not fully utilize the funds.

X

Dissatisfied with this state of affairs, the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) took a major initiative in early 1971. A seminar was convened in which approximately half the universities and several other educationists participated. Two major features emerged from this seminar: a comparative de-emphasis on internal assess-

ment and the projection of the concept of question of banking. The recommendations of the seminar were later considered by a Special Meeting of Vice-Chancellors in the latter part of the year. A certain momentum was generated, but given the prevailing social and academic situation, what tilts the scales is not an appeal to reason but insistence by those in a position to lay down the law—in respect of higher education this means the UGC. But as the UGC was more involved with the disbursement of grants than with its basic function of determining and coordinating standards, the situation concerning examinations continued to deteriorate.

Against this background, the Ministry of Education took an important initiative in late 1971. A Plan of Action in respect of examination reform was worked out. One of the experts was Director of the NCERT, but all the others were drawn from the universities. Probably for the first time, an incisive analysis of the situation was made and practical suggestions offered. As a model of conciseness and lucidity it would be difficult to improve upon the Plan that was put forward. In order to have the plan implemented by the universities, it was necessary for the UGC to endorse it, and this was achieved the following year. The Plan was put into operation soon after.

Its basic thrust pertained to three matters, each being explained in some detail in the Appendices. These were in respect of Internal Assessment, Marks and Grading, and Question Banks. Another Appendix dealt with the desirability of conducting a National Examination. To some extent that was also a plea for setting up a Central Testing Organization, which had been earlier recommended by the Education Commission. It is extraordinary, that, though the establishment of such an organization has been repeatedly recommended, the UGC has never felt sufficiently concerned to take any initiative in the matter. Two decades is long enough for any decision to be initiated and executed but there must be a curious block in the minds of its policy makers that has prevented them from acting on such an important proposal.

Of the three crucial proposals recommended by the Plan, the one that was most vigorously pushed related to the question of Marks and Grades. As a result of these efforts, almost half the universities at one stage switched over to Grading. Some were

large universities and it seemed at one time as if the tide would turn. In my judgement, with a little more effort the majority of universities would have accepted Grading as an important part of the reform movement. But somewhere along the line the will weakened, and opposition to the change was not met head on. Consequently, during the last 4-5 years, more and more universities have given up Grading. By itself it is not such a major setback except that the will to change has thereby been undermined.

Internal assessment was pushed less vigorously and was also accepted reluctantly. There was no loss of fervour as far as its protagonists were concerned, but the real bottleneck was the unhappy experience of several universities in the early sixties. What had worked in another social setting did not work in the Indian situation. In most places, internal assessment came to be used either to favour certain students or to victimize others. In only a few instance and at a few institutions did the innovation work successfully. In several institutions students revolted against it though, to be sure, in several others they wanted it to be introduced. To put the situation in its correct perspective, it must also be said that in institutions where admission was selective, where the student-teacher ratio was favourable and where the right ethos of work prevailed, there was never a serious problem.

It may be mentioned in passing at this stage that, from the mid-sixties onwards, Indian education got split into two parallel and co-existing systems. There was the vast bulk of students who were enrolled in ill-housed, ill-equipped and sub-standard colleges and there were a few thousand students who enrolled in elite colleges and other university-level institutions. Where the elite institutions were part of the university, there was an uneasiness about the absence of internal assessment. In most of these places internal assessment did not exist and the academically ambitious students suffered in consequence. In a few places, where those institutions were able to carve out a place for themselves, the system of internal assessment was followed. This also occurred in those professional institutions which were permitted to have a separate set of rules. The sum total of these development was that in the elite sector internal assessment was handled successfully. In the remaining institutions it was either not introduced and, if in certain places it was, it led to problems.

XI

The third step recommended was in respect of Question Banks. Of the various proposals made in that Plan, this proposal is elucidated with a certain amount of specific detail. Other proposals were also detailed, but they did not have the same measure of concreteness about them. Secondly, question banking was seen not in isolation but in the context of a wider scheme of academic renovation. For instance, it was almost for the first time in any such proposal that the importance of drawing up the right kind of syllabus and its division into clearly defined sub-heads was stressed. In previous proposals the merits of a well-designed question paper had been described, but the matter had been left at that. The two had now been seen in relation to each other. What is more, the role of an average teacher who was not involved with decision-making in any manner was also underlined. On the whole, it was an important step in the right direction.

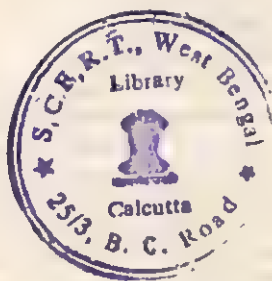
But there was one serious flaw in the scheme. In the Plan, as worked out originally, it was stated that a question bank may consist of 50-100 questions. In the Zonal Workshops which were held a couple of years later this proposal was expanded to include 100-150 questions in a paper. In my opinion, this represented only a partial understanding of the dynamics of question banking. Since I will be talking about this in greater detail later, I do not wish to say anything more at this stage than merely note the fact.

The more important thing to be said here is that hardly anything was done to popularize this concept in universities. For almost half a decade the matter remained on the drawing board. The Association of Indian Universities took up this task in right earnest—beginning with 1977, it prepared question banks in respect of a large number of university disciplines, so that by now almost every discipline at the undergraduate stage has been covered. A couple of subjects even at the post graduate stage as also some professional disciplines have by now been covered under this scheme.

The thrust of the AIU effort was primarily at the undergraduate level, where 85 per cent of the students are to be found and where the real problems are to be encountered. I was personally involved with this initiative and had suggested it first of all in

January 1971; by itself the AIU did a certain amount of pushing and promotion and in a limited way it also produced some results. However, had the UGC also promoted the scheme as strongly as it could have done the situation would have been much better than it is today. My own feeling is that, when in a few years from now this period is appraised with a fresh eye, the lack of support for question banking at that point of time will be regarded as a lapse on the part of the UGC.

The more pertinent question to raise, however, is what happened to this Plan of Action? On the whole, it was defeated—whether this was through lack of effort to promote it or the lack of assertion on the part of the UGC in providing academic leadership, or some other reason, is for those involved in universities and colleges to decide. I propose to discuss this question towards the end of my lectures in greater detail. But I do wish to say in passing at this juncture that the situation would not have been as unsatisfactory as it is today had the UGC done its job more effectively.





2 INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

The Plan of Action prepared by the Ministry of Education contains a small section right in the beginning which deals with impediments to reform. It deserves to be reproduced in full, both for its conciseness and attempt to grapple with issues in concrete detail. The exact words are given below :

In spite of the large area of agreement and the pressing need of examination reform, we have not been able to make much headway in this direction. The reasons for the failure seem to be the following :

a. A large body of teachers and educational administrators is not yet fully conscious of the subjectivity, unreliability and lack of validity of the examinations as conducted today. On the other hand, an alternative system has not been clearly spelled out before them. Of course, like most other groups, they have an inertia which goes against any change. They expound the drawbacks of internal assessment, to make it seem an evil as big as the present system of examination, without realizing that examinations of the present type undermine basic educational objectives.

b. There are vested interests. The various examination boards together have a vast machinery; they probably spend crores of rupees and thus distribute favours. Many university teachers may be earning a month's extra salary from remuneration. Those who are senior and have more voice in academic decision-making, may be earning much more than this.

c. The various agencies which could have pressed for examination reform have shown considerable lack of will in using authority, advice, and legal privilege to bring about a change. They have left the initiative in the hands of those who suffer from drawbacks (*a*) and (*b*) above.

d. The most common and relatively weighty reason given for avoiding or postponing examination reform is that if any university would give up external examinations, its degree would be devalued. Individually, teachers and institutions may support the idea of joint action of at least a few prominent universities.

This analysis is good as far as it goes but, in my opinion, it is deficient in two important respects. One, it does not take into

account the attitude of the common man in regard to university examinations. While examinations are conducted by and in educational institutions, what they signify to the public is of considerable public import: examinations are not a private transaction between students and teachers, but are also of public concern. If the academic community places a high premium on a certain level of achievement, the nature and scope of that achievement must be understood and recognized by most people. Unless it is so understood, there will be less acceptability by the public and, to that extent, a loss of credibility.

Second, this lack of alignment between public and academic perception has led to a gross error of judgement. In line with the general approach of focussing on examinations and regarding teaching and learning as of little consequence, the matter was treated as one which concerned only academics. But academics do not function in a social vacuum, and are judged not only by fellow academics but also by the general public. Even if it is assumed that the public is misinformed or misled, it is the responsibility of academics to ensure that this does not happen. In working out the Plan of Action, however, this factor was not taken into account. On the contrary, a whole structure of policy was formulated on the presumption that, once assessment by the teacher becomes the cornerstone of academic functioning, all the other problems, including the public distrust of examination, would be taken care of. That is why internal assessment was regarded as the key reform which required to be introduced. In the introduction to the Plan of Action, six points are mentioned about which it is said that there was general agreement. The last point reads as follows :

The most sound educational procedure would be to allow teachers of various courses to evaluate the performance of their students in accordance with the objectives they had set before themselves, so that instruction may be improved in the light of the evaluation. The *Report of the Education Commission* (1964-6) says on p. 290: 'One line of attack would be to abolish set syllabuses and the external examinations based on them, and to replace them by a system of internal and continuous evaluation by teachers themselves. This is already being done in some institutions, like the Indian Institutes of Technology and the agricultural universities and it could be increasingly extended to others as soon as the necessary facilities and

conditions can be provided. We hope that at no distant date it will be adopted by all the teaching universities and that the major universities would give a lead in the matter.'

The sheer effrontery of this observation is breath-taking. On what basis was it assumed that there was general agreement concerning the introduction of internal assessment? Was this question discussed in any representative forum? If so, when and where? The description of internal assessment 'as the most sound educational procedure' in India's context has no basis or any authority. It might be the opinion of the members of the committee which drew up the Plan of Action, but it does not follow that there was 'general agreement' on this issue. Even the comment of the Education Commission quoted above does not have the tone of finality which is sought to be given to it in the Plan of Action. Above all, on what grounds can it be said that what is good for the IITs is also good for a college with an enrolment of less than a hundred students?

The fact is that elitism has so penetrated the thinking of people on various committees and commissions that they are unable to study local problems except through alien eyes. Their outlook and sympathies have been conditioned to a way of thinking which renders them more or less incapable of understanding the nature of raw reality. In making internal assessment the lynch pin of a Plan of Action, a solution was sought to be imposed on the Indian situation, regardless of whether it was feasible or not.

II

Except in some elite institutions, internal assessment cannot work in India. In principle there is nothing that can be said against it. After all, what can be more natural and obvious than that the teacher who instructs also sits in judgement on whether the pupil has learnt what he had to learn? This is also in line with the 'guru-shishya tradition' that has prevailed in this country for a long time.

In our situation, internal assessment has not been accepted however. Most people regard it as an alien notion which cannot strike roots in Indian soil. As stated earlier, it has worked successfully in institutions which attracted good students and managed to maintain a positive academic ethos. But the number of such insti-

tutions is so small as not to be even one per cent of the total. What is to happen in the remaining institutions which constitute the overwhelming majority? That is the real nub of the matter. It is a pity that the Plan of Action had very little to say on this subject.

Not only did the Plan emphasize internal assessment, it also more or less ignored the public dimension of examinations. As stated earlier, an examination in a college or a university is not a private transaction but something in the nature of a public announcement. There was some dim recognition of this aspect of the problem in the list of impediments, wherein it is stated that 'the most common and relatively weighty reason given for avoiding or postponing examination reform is that if any university would give up external examinations, its degree would be devalued'. Had the logic of this argument been followed through, the committee would not have ignored the issue of public examinations as it did. As if that was not enough, the issue of booming numbers (sometimes running to as high as a quarter million in one university) was neatly side-stepped. Instead, the committee attempted to change the very basis of testing. Had the new basis come to prevail, the academic scene would no doubt have undergone a sea change. However, what happened was the exact opposite. The system of internal assessment did not come to be accepted. On the contrary, the system of public examinations got further entrenched in public esteem. Today, the common sentiment is that internal assessment can be and is usually manipulated, whereas the public examination *alone* gives a reliable index of the competence of students.

The authors of the Plan of Action and the UGC should explain why the Plan was not implemented despite the fact that the authority as well as resources of the UGC were behind it. Any number of elaborate explanations can and will be advanced, but my explanation is simple: the recommendations of the Plan of Action were unfeasible and, given the ethos of academic life and the peculiarities of the Indian situation, it could not have been implemented. Lest this be considered an overstatement, here is what the UGC said two years ago in a statement on examination reforms with the sub-title *A Minimum Programme* wherein urgent attention is drawn to the following two aspects: (a) Syllabus/Question Papers and (b) Conduct of Examinations. Since

(a) is pertinent to the issue under discussion, let it be quoted in full :

- (i) The syllabus in each paper should be demarcated into well-defined units/areas of content along with a topic-wise break-down. The units may be numbered.
- (ii) Examiners should be free to repeat questions set in previous examinations. This is necessary in order to ensure that students do not leave out important portions of the syllabus. Instructions to paper setters should be amended accordingly.
- (iii) There is often a very wide choice given to students for answering questions, say 5 out of 10. Such overall choice restricts the area of knowledge with which a student can pass an examination and is therefore undesirable. If there is choice, it may be provided by alternate questions in each unit of the syllabus.
- (iv) No examination should be held without fulfilling the requirement of a minimum number of lectures/tutorials/laboratory sessions, etc. which should be clearly laid down by the university.

The point to note here is that for the first time the importance of public examinations is recognized and nothing is said about internal assessment. The extraordinary emphasis placed on internal assessment in the Plan of Action did not lead to any positive outcome. Not only that, public examinations, instead of losing in importance had come to be accepted as not only a necessary evil but also the accepted mode of testing. That being so, it would not have served any useful purpose to emphasize the need for internal assessment any further and dwell on its mechanics, as had been done in the Plan of Action. Experience over the years had led to a reluctant recognition of the fact that the problem now was how to reform the existing system.

III

Clearly, the attempt to introduce a new system had failed and the old system had not only continued but come to enjoy a greater measure of public acceptability. In that situation the only feasible thing was to put forward proposals which would seek to improve the system of public examinations. Hence the recommendations as made above. In order not to sound inconsistent, however, and

before these four recommendations were made, it was stated :

While reiterating its support for long-term perspectives of examination reforms as spelt out in 'Examination Reforms—A Plan of Action', the Commission would suggest the following urgent measures for implementation by each and every university. These measures do not involve any change in Acts, Statutes or Ordinances and as such it is expected that universities would implement the various measures with immediate effect and latest by the beginning of the academic session 1982-3.

Gone is the earlier breezy conviction that the prevailing system of evaluation should be replaced by internal assessment. Similarly, gone is the earlier strategy whereby only a dozen universities were picked out for selective improvement. Instead, it is said that these measures have to be implemented by each and every university. Nothing is said about Question Banking, Grading, a National Examination and a number of other features. This is not to imply that the UGC had turned its back on them, but it needs to be recognized that it took the UGC almost a decade to realize that what works in one situation does not necessarily work in another.

The Indian situation was different from that in the U.S.A. in two important respects. One, the quality of those who were entering the teaching profession had been declining over the years in a marked manner. It was unrealistic to expect them to carry the load of internal assessment, which cannot be carried unless the individual undertaking the job is competent as well as conscientious. With competence declining, the situation could perhaps have been saved had there been a high degree of conscientiousness. That also has suffered a setback with every year that has passed. Social pressures were too overpowering for academics to sustain their morale or even preserve their integrity. In any case, everyone was not keen on preserving it and before long, the inevitable happened. Given their ethos of work, the academic institutions turned out to be no different from others.

Second, internal assessment, which should properly speaking be called continuous assessment, demands continuous work. While a certain number of teachers are willing to and indeed do put in continuous work, it is not true of the vast majority of them. And yet, if a system is to be evolved, everybody working in it has to conform to it. Not only that, there has to be a built-in procedure

of monitoring within that system so that once a thing is agreed upon everyone acts accordingly. This has not come to pass, except in the elite institutions where the ethos of work is different.

For confirmation of this state of affairs, one has only to look at the experience of a small number of institutions where the semester system was tried. That innovation too did not succeed, principally because it demanded intensive and continuous work from teachers as much as from students. Neither was prepared for this and the system has thus been abandoned in most places or continues only in the formal sense. Instead of an annual examination, there are now two examinations in the year with the syllabus conveniently divided into two parts, and that is all. The semester system demands a different pace of work and is based upon an entirely different philosophy of work than the one we witness in most of our academic institutions.

This reference to the semester system is incidental. What is under discussion is the willingness of academics, especially at the undergraduate level, to apply themselves systematically to the task of keeping personal contact with a large number of students and maintaining files on them. Lecturing to large classes is one thing, but dealing with students on an individual basis is different. The existing student-teacher ratio comes in the way of this kind of interaction. Nor do the policies of enrolment permit the right kind of ethos to be established. In other words, there is a whole set of preconditions which must be met before teaching and learning can take place, and these are not being met. As if this were not bad enough, everything gets vitiated by the corrupt manner in which examinations are conducted. To talk of internal assessment in this lawless situation amounts to suggesting that, if bread is unobtainable, people should eat cake instead.

IV

Educational institutions today, both colleges and universities, are no different from the market place. The moral values that prevail in them are exactly the same as those encountered anywhere else. This being so, how is it feasible to operate a system of assessment which cannot function without teachers and students trusting each other and believing in each other's bonafides? Things may be worse today than they were a decade ago. But

even a decade ago it was clear, except to those who refused to see, that the functioning of educational institutions was vitiated by the canker of manipulation and cynicism. Recommending internal assessment as the corner-stone of examination reforms in that situation could only be thought of by people with a determined unwillingness to face reality. Assessment by the teacher cannot be faulted except only on ethical and administrative grounds. When university after university abandoned internal assessment around the nineteen-sixties, considerable data calling into question both the ethical and administrative premises was generated in each one of them. Why was it ignored? It is a question that must be answered.

In this context, reference must be made once more to the widespread corruption in respect of examinations that has grown over the years. The worst affected has been the conduct of examinations, but it would be naive to think that the other two phases of examination work (before and after the examination) are untainted by corruption. As already indicated, mass copying cannot take place unless those who are in charge of the examination, i.e. the academics, have been effectively intimidated. Similarly, those who are involved in the process of checking and prevention must be willing to enter into a pact of mutual support or at least not turn a blind eye to what is happening around them.

It should not be necessary to quote chapter and verse here. All this has been happening over the years and is within the knowledge of each one of us and yet, in total disregard of the academic situation as well as the objective reality in which examinations have to be conducted, it was recommended that internal assessment be introduced in all kinds of institutions. It is true that a number of safeguards were suggested. But how were those to be enforced? Nobody asked that question or answered it. Had it been asked, it would have been clear even to the purblind that nothing was more calculated to destroy the sanctity of the academic process than vesting authority in those who had no scruples in misusing it. This is precisely what the majority of academics were doing, or at least seen to be doing.

V

At this stage I would like to venture a hypothesis. There is a

close and perhaps organic connection between corruption in educational life and corruption elsewhere. Which is the cause and which is the effect is not the issue here. The issue is whether educational institutions can be free of the virus which is corroding the rest of society. My belief is that both are expressions of the same perverted values and to a great extent support and feed each other. Practices which were unthinkable a decade or two ago have come to be accepted as the norm today. I have seen it happen before my very eyes and quite often wonder whether a career in education provides even a sanctuary from all the dishonesty and vulgarity that is encountered in most places.

In a manner of speaking, the rot begins at the early stages of education. In school or college the pupil may find teachers being remunerated even when no job is being done. At school the child may not emulate the dishonesty he witnesses around himself. But as soon as he can do so (and this means the college and the university stage), he will practise what he has observed. What chance does internal assessment have in this state of moral anarchy?

And having said this, I would like to elaborate my hypothesis thus: the day internal assessment comes to be accepted as workable in our educational institutions as the basic tool of assessment, it would be conclusive demonstration of the fact that our society is no longer diseased and has been able to cleanse itself of whatever impurities had crept into it. Should such a happy situation come to pass, the process would be seen to be divisible into two stages. The first evidence of the changing situation will be in the conduct of examinations, which would no longer remain a contest between those who wish to cheat and those who wish to prevent it, with the balance shifting more and more in favour of those who wish to cheat. Cheating in examinations is no different from cheating in any other situation. My contention, briefly, has been as follows:

One, we failed to diagnose the problem, for we refused to recognize the reality as it obtained on the ground.

Two, the remedies which we prescribed could not have succeeded in the situation in which we were working.

Three, instead of matters improving, they have deteriorated further.

Four, public examinations have come to stay in our situation. The attempt to change the system is not likely to succeed till such

time as educational institutions become centres of learning and function as they ought to function.

Five, internal assessment, while highly desirable in itself, can be used only as a supplement to the external examination and not in place of it. The safeguards suggested in this behalf in the Plan of Action need to be ensured in actual practice. It is only after these have been implemented for a certain length of time that anything like a radical restructuring of the system can even be thought of.

Six, in circulating a Minimum Programme to all universities the UGC has come to accept the error of its ways. Without formally disavowing its insistence on internal assessment it has recognized the fact that it is only by reforming the public examinations that some improvement in the situation can take place. It is a major step forward. What is required now is to give more thought to the strategy for change as well as the mechanics of change.

VI

While I will discuss the strategy and mechanics of change in my next lecture, there are three issues which I wish to take up now. One relates to the stated obsession amongst some people that no reform in the examination system is possible unless we adopt internal assessment as the principal mode of assessment. In this connection, the protagonists of internal assessment should be asked whether standards of performance in British universities are inferior to those in American universities.

British universities rely upon one final test at the end of the course administered in the usual, anonymous way characteristic of public examinations. The answers that students are required to write are usually in the form of essays which are regarded by some as neither valid nor objective nor reliable. In India we borrowed the British system and, even after over a hundred years, continue to follow it for the most part. The pertinent question therefore is: how is it that the British, despite all the defects of the system, manage to effectively educate their students who compare with the best in the world, while we in India fail to do even a reasonable job?

To some extent the answer has already been given in the course

of these lectures. Teaching and learning are not given the secondary place in British universities that they have in our universities. Students who enter the universities have usually had an intensive training so that, when they leave school, they are not academically deficient in the same way in which most of our students are. Further, the student-teacher ratio is highly favourable in the universities. While at Oxford and Cambridge a student may miss his lectures, he cannot miss his weekly tutorial. In the other universities there is not the same measure of insistence on written work. Written work is, however, done and teachers supervise it in a fairly consistent and systematic way. The only thing that does not happen in British universities, unlike the practice in American universities is to give weightage to this written work in the final result. The students' score depends upon his performance in the public examination.

The British also have some supplementary devices to ensure that there is coordination amongst universities, for instance, in following the system of external examiners they attach considerable importance to their crucial role both in respect of coordination and the actual performance of students. Secondly, moderation, both of question papers and of results, is a widely accepted practice. Thirdly, the style of question papers in British universities today is no longer the same as it was a few decades ago. The American influence has made itself felt in this respect. While some questions are certainly of the essay type, there are also questions which do not belong to that genre. The two are combined in proportions which vary from year to year and subject to subject. There are several other details that can be given, but it is not necessary to do so here. Quite a few British universities make use of the latest techniques of evaluation in regard to which the Americans have made an outstanding contribution. Thus, while the British have not given up the system that they have followed all these years they have taken over some of the useful insights and methods evolved across the Atlantic.

The purpose of this long digression, if digression it is, is to indicate that standards of performance do not depend entirely on the system of assessment. Assessment is important, but no less important are teaching and learning. In regard to both, the British universities have never been guilty of slackness nor have they allowed standards to become diluted. This did not occur even when

there was a surge of expansion after the Robbins Report in the sixties, for standards of excellence have got built into their system of education. Even when there are strains and stresses, those are not allowed to undermine the generally accepted standards of performance. In India, alas, this has not occurred and, like a bad workman who blames his tool, we have got involved in an unnecessary and perhaps unimportant controversy with regard to the modes and methods of assessment rather than the mode and content of education.

VII

The second issue that I wish to take up here pertains to the role and performance of the UGC in respect of examinations. It should be evident by now that UGC took a wrong turning when it put so much emphasis on internal assessment and had nothing to say about how external examinations are to be conducted, particularly by universities which are required to handle hundreds of thousands of students. The problems regarding mass examinations have been discussed in considerable detail by a number of people, but it is necessary to call attention once again to the inexplicable failure of the UGC to promote and establish a high-powered professional body which is concerned with these problems. Had this been done two decades ago, when it was first mooted, things might not have deteriorated to the extent that they have. The establishment of such a body today should be regarded as a major priority, therefore. One argument usually advanced is that UGC lacked statutory powers to establish such a body. That may be so. But was any move made to seek such powers? In any case, is it advisable for the UGC to establish such a body under its own auspices? Perhaps a better arrangement would be to have an independent body, with the UGC supporting it and operating through it.

Because of the role that the UGC has played in getting successive revisions in the scales of pay of university and college teachers, it has come to be the most visible of the various all-India co-ordinating bodies. There are a number of other equally important bodies and they, too, need to be drawn into the network of examination reform: these are the Medical Council of India, the Bar Council of India, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, the All-India Council of Technical Education and

one or two others, including the Association of Indian Universities. There are bodies like the Union Public Service Commission and other organizations which are equally concerned with the problem of the assessment of candidates competing for all kinds of jobs under the Government of India. In some ways they too can be involved in the proposed organization of a National Testing Service (NTS) as well as its governance.

Perhaps all these bodies can be brought together to constitute the governing board of the professional body (NTS) that ought to be organized. It is not necessary to discuss its charter of work here. Nor should it be necessary to take away some of the important functions of these various co-ordinating bodies and vest them in this new professional organization. In fact, if this is done it would create a fresh crop of problems. In other words, each of the various co-ordinating bodies should continue to exercise most of the powers it is already vested with. Only the powers concerning examinations should be exercised through the new and yet-to-be-established body. It is necessary to ensure this because, as argued repeatedly, examinations are not an independent operation and constitute a link in the academic process. To delink them from the academic process would be to defeat the overall objectives; hence this plea for the involvement of the various co-ordinating bodies as also the insistence on their co-ordinated working with the new professional body.

It is difficult to anticipate how the new body will work and what projects it will initiate and execute. Improving examinations is not the simple business many people have assumed it to be. There are three components of any meaningful action—pedagogic, technical and administrative. The pedagogic aspects should be primarily handled by academics. Though academics are usually involved in decision-making at present, they are seldom put at the centre of things which, to that extent, weakens programmes of activity. The administrative aspects are handled by the examination branch. While some people working in this branch no doubt have an appreciation of pedagogic matters, not everyone does and some of the decisions taken by the administrative branch thus lead to difficulties. Efforts are made periodically to reconcile the two points of view, with results which range from total to very partial success.

It is the technical aspect which remains sadly neglected. Some

academics and administrators no doubt have some understanding of these problems, but their number is not particularly large. In any case, the vast body of teachers seem totally innocent of the technical aspects of testing. For instance, issues like the scaling of marks and re-evaluation cannot be understood or handled properly unless those who do so possess a certain degree of technical expertise.

One important role that an expert body such as the NTS would perform would be to combine these three requirements in its policies as well as its personnel. Consequently, decisions taken would be integrated in character. The present state of isolation between teaching, learning and testing should to some extent disappear in consequence. This, in turn, would lead to better academic performance all around. In any case, there should not be the slightest doubt that, with a student population as vast as in India and with the problems being so complex and so persistent, there has to be an expert body whose principal responsibility is to provide the kind of expertise which today is encountered here and there in an isolated and disorganized fashion. We need a centralized body which is basically professional in character and works in close collaboration with the various co-ordinating bodies already in existence.

An equally important matter that requires to be tackled by the UGC is to monitor what the universities do or do not do. Even the Plan of Action adopted a decade ago could have been more successful had there been some monitoring by the UGC. What usually happens is something like this: a circular is issued by the UGC to the universities: it is in turn reported to the university bodies, which discuss it perfunctorily and then take certain decisions. Whether those decisions are acted upon or not is another matter. Our Vice-Chancellors on the whole are a harassed lot, and most of them have neither the time, inclination nor energy to implement those decisions. Once in a while somebody wakes up, there is a flurry of inconclusive activity and the matter is left at that.

What is to be done in this situation? The forces for reform within a university are not sufficiently strong to leave the matter to the university alone. The initiative taken by the UGC manifests itself principally in the form of a mere communication to the universities that is barely acted upon and that is

how we have drifted year after year and decade after decade. Regarding examinations, the UGC did set up an internal mechanism called the Implementation Committee which met off and on and reviewed the situation. But the whole matter was handled so casually and in such low key that, except for informing itself, the UGC did not undertake a campaign in pursuit of what it had recommended. As stated earlier, some progress was made in regard to grades and marks. However, this momentum too was allowed to die and the situation reverted to what it was.

Lack of monitoring is one of the more serious failings of the UGC. The Review Committee which reported in early 1977 also commented on this. However, nothing has been done so far to create a suitable monitoring mechanism in the UGC. Regardless of whether this will ever occur, it is clear that without sustained monitoring by the UGC not much will get done at the ground level. Even should the UGC monitor each university, there is likely to be evasion, resistance and even non-performance in the university, but such questions could be tackled at a later stage.

This is not the occasion to dilate further on the importance of monitoring by the UGC, for monitoring is without question an important role for an organization like the UGC. Examination reform is one of the areas where, without sustained and intensive monitoring by the UGC, very little is likely to be done because the forces ranged against it are much too deeply rooted in the academic and social situation in universities and colleges. In the Minimum Programme circulated to the universities, there is an indication that monitoring the work of universities in this area is a part of the scheme. Something is perhaps being done, but it has to be both more 'vigorous' and 'sustained', as the Education Commission put it.

VIII

The UGC as well as the various other co-ordinating bodies have another very important job to perform. As most academics do not have the requisite information concerning the technical aspects of examinations, systematic, professional training in regard to all these matters is necessary for them. The Association of Indian Universities has been attempting to provide this training through correspondence courses at two or three levels for the last

few years, but not even a couple of hundred candidates have successfully completed them. Quite a large number joined and then dropped out. Whatever the explanation, the fact remains that the overwhelming majority of academics do not know what they ought to know about the latest methods of testing and examining and their lack of knowledge on this front amounts to perpetuating the existing state of ignorance and apathy. Every co-ordinating agency connected with higher education in the country should be involved in the process of training teachers to overcome this situation. Teachers of medicine have one kind of requirement, teachers of engineering another kind, and teachers in the arts, science and commerce faculties have yet another kind of requirement, and so on. Clearly, the programme would have to be prepared keeping in view the requirements of various categories of teachers, their mode of working, their period of availability, and such other details. At this stage what needs to be emphasized is that without such training being imparted to everyone in the teaching profession, it would not be possible to make any effective advance on this front.

3 A MINIMUM PROGRAMME

Having said so much in criticism of internal assessment in the Indian situation, it is perhaps incumbent on me to suggest an alternative approach. It is gratifying therefore to be able to say that the UGC has already suggested what requires to be done through its latest and, in my opinion, experience-based thinking as embodied in its Minimum Programme, from which I quoted earlier. It may be helpful, however, to go into the line of reasoning which led the UGC to identify two items of activity as the basic items which need to be attended to on a priority basis.

Even at the risk of repeating myself, I would like it to be recognized that, after a futile and wasteful attempt to introduce internal assessment for almost a decade, the UGC has come to the conclusion that it lacks the capability of changing the system of assessment and that the complexities of the Indian situation do not permit it to do so. This in turn has led it to realize clearly that, if the system of external examinations could not be replaced, the only feasible alternative was to do something to improve it.

As we have already noted, over the years several people had offered all kinds of suggestions to improve the examination system. To recapitulate: as early as 1950, the Radhakrishnan Commission Report had recommended a judicious mix of the new type of questions with the old, essay-type. The Education Commission however, favoured (a) the introduction of more frequent, periodical assessment so that undue emphasis on the final examination as the sole determinant of success was reduced, and (b) reform of evaluation techniques. With regard to (b), not much was achieved. As for (a), everything hinged upon the mode of assessment which, in its essentials, was expected to be internal rather than external. Consequently, even this reform could not be implemented. It was against such a background, and a few years later, that the Plan of Action was projected.

The Minimum Programme has identified four major steps that need to be taken concerning the framing of syllabi, how question papers are to be set, why offering a very wide choice of questions militates against effective learning and what are the precondi-

tions for teaching and learning which must be fulfilled before an examination is held. A brief reference to the relevant text of the Programme as given in the Appendices illustrates the point that is sought to be made here.

Each of these points is based on the recognition that the academic system is being undermined by the neglect of teaching as well as learning and the negative role that testing for the sake of testing plays in respect of both teaching and learning. All the relevant aspects of the problem are covered with the emphasis that they deserve, as also the mutually complementary role that each plays in order to evolve an appropriate strategy.

Coming to the Programme's second recommendation about the conduct of examinations, no details are elaborated. Perhaps it was not necessary to do so, for universities know what requires to be done as most of them have years of experience in conducting examinations. For obvious reasons, the Minimum Programme could not have gone into the question of why examinations are not conducted satisfactorily. While one important reason is the corruption that seeps into academic life from outside, no less insidious is the collapse of integrity within the profession. Corruption in examinations is the most blatant manifestation of what is corroding the academic system both from within and without. If this corruption is to be removed, as without question it must be, stringent sanctions will have to be devised against those academics who connive at this kind of corruption. In plain words, it is important to draw a distinction between academics and non-academics who are guilty of corruption. In my opinion, academics caught in the act need to be penalized more severely than non-academics. Academics, in a sense, are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that nothing goes wrong and if they do not behave with due probity, their fault is much greater.

In their sum total, the recommendations of the Minimum Programme seek to meet those preconditions to which I have referred repeatedly and which, in my opinion, cannot be whittled down except at the cost of writing off the system. Teaching has to be done in an effective manner, but teaching is not an end in itself and has to lead to competent and successful learning. How well learning has taken place can be found out only through testing, and testing too cannot be an end in itself. Its primary function is to evaluate the learning that has taken place and to some extent

also aid the process of learning. The proposals made in the Minimum Programme seek to achieve these objectives and grapple with the heart of the problem. However, even if all the four important and inter-related steps are taken in full, their impact will be lost unless the proper conduct of examinations is ensured. If examinations are tainted by corruption in any way, there will be no way of knowing whether teaching has been done effectively and whether learning has followed in consequence.

The focus of the four recommendations of the Minimum Programme is on the academic preparation that precedes testing. Without that preparation testing has no meaning and hence, equally important is the manner in which learning and teaching are done.

II

If the Minimum Programme is so well devised, where is the problem then? The problem lies in the extent to which this Programme may or may not be implemented. I have already referred to a crucial bottleneck in this regard—the lack of monitoring by the UGC. Whether the UGC can improve on this front in the years to come remains to be seen. This is one aspect of the problem. The second aspect is that the UGC regards its Minimum Programme as one of the numerous things it has undertaken to do. My contention is that nothing that the UGC does or can do is more crucial than ensuring that this Programme is implemented both in letter and spirit. I would go further and submit that everything else that a university does or seeks assistance for should be secondary to what it does in respect of the Minimum Programme. The Minimum Programme is meant not only for better examinations, but also for better teaching and learning. It is learning primarily which is at a discount in today's situation. If we can put it at the centre of things, most other problems would get taken care of.

Perhaps this should be explained further. Whatever happens in a university is designed to improve learning. Whether it be the creation of physical facilities or library and laboratory facilities or provision of hostels or other facilities, everything is meant ultimately to facilitate learning and make it more meaningful. Even the selection of teachers, the scales of pay that are given to them, the other amenities that are provided to them, the conditions of

work and service which are devised for them, the way the academic terms are organized, indeed everything that happens in a university is ultimately designed to make better learning possible.

Over the years, each of these issues has come to assume a separate importance of its own and command both attention and patronage. Their total thrust which is meant to ensure better and more competent learning has, however, been lost sight of. In every university, therefore, these individual items get discussed in a manner and measure that they do not deserve. What they are meant to accomplish in their total aggregate—better learning—does not receive an equal measure of attention and a blurring of the true focus takes place. The Minimum Programme seeks to restore this focus and that is why I would like to see it implemented.

III

While the Minimum Programme outlines the nature of the required change, it is somewhat weak as far as the strategy of change is concerned. How is the change to be brought about? This is a question that has not been faced and represents a serious gap in planning.

Reference has been made more than once to the imperative need for monitoring by the UGC. The same should apply to the various other all-India co-ordinating bodies too. Monitoring by these numerous bodies is important and, indeed, indispensable. It will be difficult to accomplish anything significant without some degree of accountability on the part of universities and colleges to these various co-ordinating bodies whose primary task is to determine and maintain standards. From this, however, it need not be inferred that monitoring alone will ensure that the job is done. A part of the job would certainly get done because an all-India body like the UGC charged with the responsibility of co-ordinating standards of performance is determined to ensure that some positive steps are taken. Even though it would be naive to believe that by itself this alone would ensure total success, a determined and co-ordinated drive by these various co-ordinating agencies would certainly achieve something.

It would not be out of place to discuss here what is meant by monitoring. In order to understand this concept one has to link it with the lack of accountability in our academic system, something

to which reference has been made earlier. With nobody seeming to feel accountable for what happens or does not happen, somebody has got to worry about all the effort and expenditure that go into higher education. Who shall it be? Shall it be the individual unit (a college or a university department)? Or shall it be the bigger unit which performs the role of being responsible for what others connected with it, whether in an affiliating role or otherwise, do or fail to do? An equally valid principle of organization would be to expect, even require, every co-ordinating agency in the field of higher education to prescribe and enforce what the institutions connected with them should do.

This is already happening in a number of areas. For instance, the Medical Council has laid down the rules of admission, the qualifications that must be fulfilled by those seeking admission, the manner in which students are to be instructed as well as tested and a whole host of other things. In respect of the Minimum Programme, the UGC too has already prescribed what is required. The only issue now is to ensure that it is done and done so decisively that nobody can argue about the aims and methods of doing so. It should not be necessary to go into details here. Anyone with any experience of administration knows what has to be achieved in a situation like this and how to ensure compliance with the directive issued. Nothing short of total compliance will do, especially in a matter so fundamental to the health of the academic system.

In order to have a better record of performance, it is important that improvements occur even at the local and State levels, in colleges and the universities to which these colleges are affiliated. The stubborn problem in higher education is at the undergraduate level, which contains 85 per cent of the students. A large number of students are not interested in what is done in the classroom, but their presence has to be recognized as well as taken into account while planning any kind of change. This is not to imply that problems at the postgraduate level are easier to solve or are less urgent. Only their scale is much smaller. Therefore in terms of strategy one should primarily think of dealing with the problems that will arise in respect of the vast body of undergraduates.

Given the UGC's comparative neglect of monitoring thus far, we should attempt to devise a strategy that makes it possible for monitoring to take place even on a local basis, without necessarily

relying on the UGC. Perhaps a strategy could be devised whereby students and teachers monitor each other in the classroom. To monitor what is being done once a year is one thing, but to do so everyday and day after day is quite different. In my judgement, the concept of question banking is one such device and it deserves to be examined much more carefully from this point of view. When I first put it forward in 1971, I looked upon it precisely in this light. It appeared to me to be a potent instrument for creating the kind of teaching situation in the classroom which does not exist today but which it is possible to create provided we change our technique of teaching.

IV

What was my starting point in advocating question banking? It was clear to me that in our situation internal assessment would not work. It was evident that, whether good or bad, we were stuck with the examination system which we had inherited, but that something had to be done to improve it. The rot began right from the beginning. The manner in which the syllabus was drawn up left a good deal to be desired. For instance, the committee of courses in a particular subject would meet and, after some casual discussion, agree upon a few things. It was left to the convenor to draw up the minutes. In some cases he wrote down what had been agreed upon but in others he injected items on his own so as to tilt the balance in certain unforeseen directions. Most members of the committee were not interested in what was happening, except in the power and patronage which their membership of the committee conferred on them. At any rate, they could not be bothered to attend to these details and the details therefore were settled by the man who wrote the minutes in whatever manner he thought best.

In the majority of cases, perhaps 70-80 per cent, students would not even know the scope of the paper in which they were being instructed and merely noted what the teacher taught in the classroom. Whether what he taught was in pursuance of an overall design or not remained a mystery to students. In any case, not many students cared to find out, and everything was left to the teacher. Whether he took his job seriously or not was for him to decide. There were no pressures, social or academic, to make him rise to

the demands on him. The syllabus was so sketchy and sometimes so unbalanced that the teacher could give it any interpretation he wished. In most cases, regardless of the details of the syllabus, his lecture was always the same. The syllabus may have changed from time to time, but seldom his lecture. That apart, the syllabus did not give the teacher any guidelines and it was up to him to interpret it as he wished. Usually he so interpreted it as not to extend himself in any direction. That is why he taught whatever he knew regardless of whether the syllabus demanded it or otherwise.

It was therefore clear that unless syllabi are drawn up much more carefully and in greater detail, with an overall design and the objectives of teaching clearly stated, the performance of the average teacher would not improve. Let it not be forgotten that we operate in a system in which colleges are affiliated to a university. What are the points of contact between a college and the university? Mainly two. One is the syllabus prescribed by the university and the other is the examination conducted by it. Unless the syllabus is a well-ordered and comprehensive document which also lays down a programme of work, contact between the university and college does not get properly established. To use military parlance, the syllabus must be something like a regimental order and what is contained in it has to be acted upon. So as to have the requisite authority, the regimental order must say everything clearly and concisely and leave no room for ambiguity or prevarication.

In order to illustrate this point, it would be useful to say that every syllabus of every university discipline, both at the undergraduate and at the postgraduate levels, should include the following features:

1. The relative weightage of each topic. Some topics require more attention than others. How much more attention or otherwise is to be given to various topics should be indicated through a notation—for instance, one topic may carry the weightage of 20 per cent and another 10 per cent, and so on.

2. The approximate teaching time that is expected to be given in the classroom. In their aggregate, it should become clear whether a particular paper requires 50 hours or 100 hours of teaching, or more or less. This would enable both the teachers and the framers of the time-table to act in accordance with the recommendation made. Not only that, these details would have a direct bearing on the total duration of teaching days in an academic year.

According to the UGC, every college or university must teach for 180 days in the year, excluding time spent on examinations and other marginal activity. In actual practice, as everybody knows, no more than 33-50 per cent of this obligation is fulfilled. However, once the syllabus makes clear the required number of teaching hours (and, in their aggregate, the various syllabi should add up to 180 days), it would set into motion the new kind of monitoring machinery which is the need of the hour.

3. Perhaps most importantly, the text of the syllabus should state clearly what abilities, skills and attitudes are meant to be developed in a particular paper or discipline. Clarity about the objectives of learning is by now a well accepted part of educational philosophy. It is odd to put it no more strongly that in India we do not regard it as a matter of supreme importance.

Writing on this subject a few years ago I explained the approach as follows:

When the syllabus is compiled like this and taught say in a hundred colleges and maybe by five hundred teachers, the 'message' of the university is interpreted by different people differently. In other words, it is entirely up to the teacher to interpret the syllabus as he chooses. . . .

If the 'message' of the university is to be interpreted by everyone according to his light and his willingness to 'decode' it, the situation will vary from teacher to teacher and from college to college. Should that be so? The only proper answer one can make is in the negative. . . the next question which arises is what do we do about it? The obvious answer is that the syllabus should be worked out in careful detail and with a set of directions which are unambiguous in character. In plain words, it should not be open to a teacher to interpret the syllabus in whichever way he wants. . . .

If affiliation is to have any meaning, the relationship between the college and the university must be precisely defined. . . .

I can almost hear some people whispering to one another that this is going backwards and not forwards. What they would like to see is an altogether different kind of arrangement, whereby the teacher sets his own syllabus and teaches according to what he considers to be right and proper.

But in India, we function according to the affiliating system, which has its own compulsions. Decisions are made at one central point (the university in this case) and the colleges have no choice

except to carry them out. In plain words, the limitations of the affiliating system must be recognised and accepted till such time as the system is changed. It is not possible to be an affiliated college in India and then attempt to function like an American college, for the two are mutually incompatible. An attempt to reconcile the two modes of organization has been made and the concept of an autonomous college has been evolved. Unfortunately, even this experiment has thus far failed to take off the ground.

There is also the related question of large chunks of the syllabus being ignored altogether. Questions in the question paper are framed in such a way that there is a lot of choice and, in any case, the general assumption is that questions set in the last year will not be repeated without a gap. In consequence, there are certain parts of the syllabus which can be left out conveniently without detriment to the need to prepare for the examination. Evidently, if better learning is to be ensured the question paper has to be designed in such a manner as not to permit this kind of thing.

The issue of redesigning question papers has been considered to be of crucial importance for a number of years. It should not be necessary to say anything more on the subject except to add one thing. Question papers cannot be redesigned in a meaningful and emphatic way except with reference to the syllabus. The two have to be brought into alignment with each other if the objective of the right kind of testing (based upon the right kind of teaching and learning) has to be achieved. Hence the importance of remodelling university syllabi as a crucial, preparatory step to the redesigning of question papers.

V

What about the job in the classroom? I recalled to myself my habit of asking students a number of questions when I finished discussing a particular topic. Their answers gave me an indication of whether they had followed what I had explained, and where the gaps were—in certain cases things had to be gone over again. Another variant of this was the questions raised by students—they may not have followed something and wanted their doubts to be cleared. Once those were presented I tried to clarify matters. All this resulted in that close interaction between teacher and student which is one of the joys and rewards of teaching.

I further recalled that, when I was asked to set a question paper, I often drew upon questions that had presented themselves to my mind as I was teaching. Frequently I referred to questions framed in the past either by myself or by colleagues and altogether there was a bank of some 100-200 questions from which to draw upon. Only 10 or 12 of them had to be identified and then put in a certain order. But the total stock of questions at my disposal was considerably larger. If, in addition to the syllabus drawn up by the committee of courses, a few model question papers could also be drawn up by it so that the external examiner by and large conformed to the pattern envisaged by the committee, it would not only be more logical and in line with its approach but also minimize administrative and academic problems. It was clear to me, therefore, that not only must the committee of courses draw up a list of objectives, a detailed syllabus with hours of instruction assigned to each topic as also their relative weightage, but also a couple of model question papers.

From a few model question papers it was only another step to paraphrasing each of the topics included in the syllabus into a large number of questions. Each topic has a number of aspects and sub-aspects and can be approached from a variety of angles. Each topic contains within itself a variety of details which in turn come to acquire a new meaning and a new significance when related to other topics. It would be possible, I argued to myself, to paraphrase the syllabus of any university subject at any level into a few hundred questions.

Every teacher could and, indeed, should participate in this exercise of framing questions. This would give teachers not only a feeling of involvement but prompt those so inclined to dig deeper into the subject and explore the interconnections in several ways and from a variety of approaches. Apart from teachers, even students could be involved in this exercise. There are always a few students in almost every class who are alert to what the teacher is doing and the direction in which he is taking them. Such students can be expected as well as encouraged to play the role of framing appropriate questions at the appropriate level.

VI

Then there was the psychological dimension of examinations.

Almost everywhere in the world students are afraid of them. In the period preceding any kind of a test most people find themselves in a state of tension, which sometimes becomes unbearable and leads to a state of psychosis.

In seeking to analyse this problem further I concluded that the source of this apprehension is the fact that the examination is set for *us* by *others*. Would one's state of mind be different, I asked myself, if the timing of the examination were to be chosen by one-self? The obvious analogy that came to mind was the driving test preparatory to getting a driving licence. The candidate prepares for the test day in and day out but it is for him to decide when he is ready for the test. To a large extent, we are afraid of being tested not necessarily because we feel ourselves to be unequal to the test or are afraid of being rejected, but because the choice of the timing is imposed from outside. Could this analogy be applied to examinations as one knows them? Presumably not. Examinations are fixed according to a certain schedule drawn up by people who are totally anonymous as far as most of us are concerned. The schedule is drawn up by others and we have no choice except to conform to that schedule, which, in turn gives rise to apprehensions we have already referred to.

Is there any way of overcoming this apprehension? There is no answer to this, except that one feels somewhat less apprehensive when, at the end of a lecture, the teacher asks a few questions and students are able to answer them. Putting and answering of questions must be as much a part of every day instruction as is the usual, general kind of exposition of a subject.

VII

If question banking is adopted as a strategy of teaching and if teaching in the classroom is done in relation to the hundreds of questions that are or could be framed, it would lead to a tremendously enriching pedagogic experience. Mostly, however, teaching is skimpy, inter-relations are seldom brought out and, except for a handful of students who can establish the inter-connections themselves, the rest leave the class room in a state of semi-vacuity. The availability of a large number of questions could transform the teaching scene. Things would be vastly different if these questions could be made available both to teachers and students.

As far as teachers are concerned, the questions would be like milestones, so to speak. As for students, they would be the signposts to learning. The teacher would know how far and in which direction to explore his subject and the student would come to know the terrain and the turns and twists much better. Occasionally, students could also prompt the teachers to explore a direction which had somehow remained untouched. There are endless possibilities of intellectual interaction between students and teachers that could follow the use of question banks.

So far so good, as they say. The adoption of this innovation, it was clear to me, would make for much better teaching and much better learning. But how to ensure that the student willingly travelled with the teacher in that uncharted territory of knowledge? It was to kindle an enthusiasm for study in the heart of the student that the concept of question banking was formulated. What if students could be made to believe that there would be no surprises in the examination and that what they were to be examined from was already known to them! In other words, a collection of questions could be presented to students as if it were a pot of gold, and all that they had to do was to make sure that they did not miss the chance of bidding for it. Even if it is wicked to seduce students into the act and pursuit of learning through cupidity, the cause of learning more than justified it.

This is one aspect of the proposal. Another is to use question banking as an aid to teaching. This can be easily done, and through it the syllabus is no longer a remote and unknown document. It is paraphrased and elaborated for students into hundreds of questions so that, by the time a syllabus is covered, students with the help of the questions already contained as part of a syllabus can verify for themselves whether they know the answers to them or not. As far as the teacher is concerned the questions formulated as part of a syllabus indicate to him the limits within which he has to operate, as also the extent of freedom that is available to him to stray from the limits laid down. A couple of universities have already adopted this practice with positive results; but we need to persuade a larger number of universities and teachers to look upon this new strategy of teaching as a step which unlocks for them unsuspected avenues of student-teacher interaction.

However, there are two common misconceptions about question banking and those must be dealt with. One is that it is some

kind of compromise with the devil. It has been suggested, for instance, that there cannot be an examination if students already know the questions they are going to be asked. The assumption here seems to be that students should be taken by surprise and, unless this occurs, the examination cannot be regarded as a test of ability. In my opinion, this misjudges the purpose of evaluation, which is not to spring surprises upon students or to put them at a disadvantage. The purpose is to find out whether students have learnt what they set out to learn. If they have learnt, the only other relevant question is how well they have done so. This leads to issues like marking and grading, on which subjects a good deal of research has been done in recent decades and policies can be framed in the light of those findings. At any rate, it should be clear beyond doubt that no examiner should attempt to outwit the examinees.

The second misconception is to be seen in a proposal of the Plan of Action. The original Plan suggested that only 50-100 questions be framed per paper. This was a travesty of the original concept, for the intention is not only to cover the broad outline, but to go even into the minute details of a subject. Not only that, the interconnections must also be elaborated. If a total view of the situation is taken it should be clear that the number of questions cannot but be very substantial, whether they are 500 or 1000 per discipline at the relevant level or more or less is not the issue. The issue simply is that the entire range of study must be explored in depth so that students and teachers cover a subject as fully as possible. Where the number of questions in a question bank is small, it also raises the spectre of help-books being published. A large number of questions makes this unlikely, but if it does, all glory to those who master everything about that limited territory of knowledge which a particular paper contains. What more can one want of a student than that he knows everything about a chosen topic?

Some of you might wonder why I am taking so much time in going into such details. My answer to this is threefold:

(1) both teaching and learning belong to what I call the grey areas in our academic situation. If a proposal can help ensure better teaching as well as better learning it is to be welcomed;

(2) without some kind of motive power, it would be difficult to give that leverage to teaching and learning which, properly speak-

ing, belongs to them. Where is the motive power to come from, but by linking up teaching with testing in the manner suggested here. By themselves, teachers may not be enthusiastic about teaching. But once students know that what they are learning and the way they are learning enables them to take examinations in their stride, they will not only enjoy study but perhaps even become enthusiastic about it;

(3) by using the concept of question banking as the central strategy of teaching in our situation, what we really do is to lock students and teachers into an arrangement where they monitor each other's moves and actions and, no less important, their respective commitments to teaching and learning. Such a strategy cannot but draw the best out of both. Students would like to learn everything that can be of use to them in an examination and teachers will be obliged to teach all they can because the students so demand it. Seen in these cold terms, this argument might seem to be an exercise in sophistry. But I am convinced that, in our situation, where professional consciousness is virtually non-existent and the desire for learning is both patchy and superficial, there cannot be a better way of making both students and teachers stretch themselves to the maximum of their capabilities. Even at the risk of seeming to exaggerate, I would say that this aspect of the proposal should outweigh every objection that can be made against question banking.

VIII

Having talked about question banking at some length, I wish to say three things in conclusion. One, the system of public examinations has come to stay in our country, at least for the present. It may not be the best possible system, but it cannot be discarded altogether. In fact enlightened opinion is in favour of having a mix of short-answer and essay-type questions and the latter is usually associated with the traditional system as practised in India. The Radhakrishnan Commission said so in categorical terms and so have several other well informed experts. In my eyes, the principal significance of the Minimum Programme circulated by the UGC, more or less in supersession of the earlier Plan of Action, lies precisely in the fact that the UGC has ultimately accepted the realities of the Indian situation and is no longer insistent upon

imposing something which is acceptable neither to students nor society at large. This being so, the focus has to be on reforming the existing system rather than evolving a new one.

Two, if we are by and large adhering to the existing system, even through suitable modifications, we have to think of ways and means whereby not only do examinations improve but instruction and learning are also made more effective. Question banking has an important contribution to make in this regard. It may not be all that is being claimed for it. At the same time it is probably the only pedagogic technique which is not only capable of producing good results but also of generating a certain degree of momentum to keep the academic process going. Having buried the ghost of internal assessment it is time now to embark on a fresh phase of effort.

The Minimum Programme is a welcome development and we need to enrich it by integrating the concept of question banking with it. This concept is discussed in quite some detail in the Report of the Seminar on 'Examinations in Higher Education' conducted by the AIU in 1971 (See Appendix I) as well as the Plan of Action put out in 1972. In the course of my remarks I have only added some further details and tried to argue that question banking not only cuts across the barriers of teaching, learning and testing but also integrates all three. Above all, in our stagnant situation, no other approach to the problem has a greater potentiality for releasing the hidden forces of reform and renovation.

Three, I would not like to claim that every possible issue in respect of examinations has been dealt with in the course of these lectures. For my part I have focussed on the primacy of teaching and learning, the organic relationship that testing has with these two preceding stages and the manner in which all three should be integrated so as not to create any imbalances. I have also talked about why we have failed to solve the problem so far and how it can be solved by adopting the right approach.

It is not my intention to dilate on these problems any further except to say that there are quite a number of other important issues as well which have to be dealt with. I have not chosen to refer to any of them. For one thing, most of these issues arise after the proposed line of argument has been accepted and, for another, the material already available on the subject can be referred to. To

some extent, the issues also require to be discussed in further detail. What is missing is a perspective and a programme. In my modest way I have tried to present both and I conclude in the hope that the line of argument presented here will make us re-examine our earlier strategies and programmes and compel some rethinking on the subject.



APPENDIX I

A POOL OF QUESTIONS

No reform in examinations is possible unless teachers as well as students are involved in very large numbers. The existing system is so firmly established that to change it even in minor matters requires enormous effort. And if the change intended to be carried out relates to the redesigning of question-papers, the amount of resistance encountered will be extraordinarily all-pervasive and persistent. To (a) overcome these difficulties, to (b) improve the tone and content of teaching, and to (c) facilitate changes in curricula, a new idea was mooted and it deserves serious consideration.

The idea is not all that new, in a manner of speaking. Today the syllabus is laid down by a committee of courses consisting of a small number of people while the actual teaching is done by the wide mass of teachers. (The situation being what it is, it is difficult to visualise a change in it in the near future.) In regard to the syllabus, however, it has already been suggested that, in addition to what is done at present, the objectives of instruction should be formulated clearly and in some detail. This would be a break with the existing system. Perhaps this can be carried out relatively easily.

The next step is more difficult and more open to controversy. According to the prevalent practice, a paper-setter in a certain subject is appointed. He sets the question-paper and sends it to the university. In certain cases it is moderated. In certain other cases it is printed without anyone having a further look at it. The crucial change proposed is that the paper-setter while drafting his question-paper need not operate exclusively on his own resources. Instead his main job should be to select questions with due emphasis on spread, internal choice, relative emphasis on different types of questions, etc. from a pool of questions maintained by the university on an on-going and continuous basis. The mechanics of the arrangement can be some-what like this.

The detailed syllabus (which will include a clear formulation of the objectives of that course) as drafted by the committee of courses will be circulated to all teachers. They, in turn, will be invited to frame questions in relation to the syllabus. There will be no restrictions on the number of questions that they may frame. In fact the larger the number of questions framed, the more extensive will be their participation. All the questions thus framed

will be sent to the university office and presented to the committee of courses at its next meeting. Obviously quite a number of these questions will be repetitive. These can be deleted. In the case of the rest, if found suitable in relation to the objectives of the syllabus already formulated and circulated, these would be put on the list of approved questions. A considerable amount of editing and classification will be required. This would be necessary so as to put everything on a systematic basis instead of having it in a haphazard manner. In other words, pre-testing of questions would be an important condition which must be fulfilled before these are included in the pool.

An important aspect of this scheme is to treat it not as a once-in-a-life-time-affair. That would be to completely misunderstand the objectives of the scheme. The scheme requires as a matter of fact that, as a part of their instruction, the teachers should keep on framing questions in collaboration with their students and that this exercise is undertaken not only once in a year but repeatedly and at intervals. Indeed some of the questions framed earlier can be rejected and new ones framed after some time. This will indicate not only a greater sense of participation on the part of teachers and students but also a deeper understanding of the subject on the part of both.

These questions would belong, according to the scheme, to the various categories suggested above. There would be essay-type questions, short-answer questions, structured questions, objective questions, indeed all the various categories enumerated in the foregoing pages. In the pool of questions maintained by the university office, the questions would be also classified under these various headings and maintained accordingly. As a matter of fact, it is visualised that the larger the number of questions the easier it would become to carry through any innovations that might be decided upon. Sometimes the number of such questions may run to hundreds and this, so to speak, would be a measure of the success of the scheme.

Most crucial to the whole scheme is the involvement of students in the formulation of questions. Teachers are accustomed to designing questions for their students as a part of their normal work. What is proposed now however is that students too, and in larger and larger numbers, should be associated with this task. This can be done in more than one way. Teachers can formulate questions and try them out on their students. Wherever necessary they can amend them in the light of students' performance and criticism received. Alternatively students themselves may propose questions and those can be tried in the class and finally adopted for inclusion in the proposed pool of questions. This will also help in the pre-testing of questions referred to above.

Should these questions be regarded as completely confidential

or should these be public property? Opinion was divided on this question. Those in favour of making them public maintained that if a student knew the answers to all the questions in the pool nothing better could be expected from him. Others countered by saying that in regard to certain types of questions, mainly relating to application of knowledge to new situations, keeping them confidential was desirable. No unanimous decision could be arrived at in the matter. A kind of consensus was however reached whereby if the pool of questions was extensive and the number of questions included was several hundreds (thousands if they are of the objective type) nothing would be lost by making them public.

As should be evident from the details of the scheme (and these are mostly tentative in character), the principal responsibility for initiating and carrying the change through would devolve upon the committee of courses. In other words, leadership has to be provided by a group of knowledgeable and forward-looking people. If a few of them can come together in a certain committee and are vested with the power of laying down the syllabus, formulating the objectives of study, processing the very large number of questions received from teachers and students, the most decisive step in favour of change would have been taken. But if anyone of these pre-conditions is either missing or if the persons involved are weak in motivation and strength, the possibility of accomplishing the change would to that extent diminish.

Two further points may be made here. Since there will be a large range of questions to choose from, the task of the paper-setter would be considerably simplified. Instead of having one or two question-papers set by him it should be perfectly feasible, and convenient, as far as he is concerned, to have a larger number of question-papers set. Any one of these chosen at random can finally be printed. Another variation on this proposal could be that in order to minimise the chances of mass copying, a problem which has assumed serious proportions in recent years at certain places particularly at the under-graduate level, a number of different question-papers (with almost the same difficulty value) are distributed simultaneously to examinees in a hall. Since students sitting next to each other would be solving different question-papers, the chances of their communicating with each other would diminish, if not disappear.

Whatever has been said above applies to other forms of testing, such as practicals, oral tests, etc. Whether the question-papers thus set are also required to be moderated or not is an issue that needs to be examined. If it is maintained that the pool of questions has already been sifted and, in a sense, moderated by the whole committee and that the question-paper is drawn primarily from that pool of questions, moderation does not seem to be all that incumbent. On the other hand, it can be argued that

moderation is a concept of much wider significance and therefore these question-papers also ought to be moderated. On balance the seminar was in favour of the latter point of view.

Reproduced from :

Report of a Seminar on Examinations in Higher Education held by the Association of Indian Universities in 1971.

APPENDIX II

A MINIMUM PROGRAMME

1. Examinations occupy a very important place in our educational system and have today become the central pivot round which the whole of education including the syllabi, course of study, method of teaching, employment potentialities etc. must revolve. It would not be an exaggeration to say that examinations have a determining influence not only on the system of education but on the standards of teaching and research and the careers of millions of students. Students appearing at university examinations are, in a manner of speaking, marked for life.

2. The present system of examinations in our universities with its lack of reliability, validity and objectivity and undue emphasis on rote memory and regurgitation of knowledge has come in for much adverse criticism during the last three decades or so. It is also said that examinations have acquired such a stranglehold over the teaching-learning process that what we have got today is a system of examinations and not of education. Keeping in view these and other related considerations, the University Grants Commission had endorsed the 'Plan of Action' on Examination Reforms and through wide-ranging consultations in a series of regional workshops evolved a consensus in favour of three important measures of reform viz. continuous internal evaluation, question banks and grading. A number of universities responded to these suggestions in a positive way and many more are trying to restructure their examinations in accordance with the prescribed guidelines and framework. It goes without saying that the University Grants Commission continues and would continue to support these measures, both academically and financially.

3. While the above measures have already created an impact, an ugly spectre has raised its head during the last two or three years. The incidence of mass copying and use of unfair means has increased to such an extent that examinations in some of the universities are becoming a farce. Many universities are unable to hold examinations according to schedule or even to put in the requisite number of teaching days before holding examinations. The actual conduct of examinations has become a nightmare. Notes and other materials are smuggled in the examination halls and answers to question-papers are announced on loud speakers. Sometimes, there is a constant threat to the life and limb of the invigilators or examiners. Consequently, examinations and degrees awarded by a

number of universities have suffered in their credibility. The concerned universities are unable to properly discharge the trust which is put in them by the legislatures to certify the quality of graduates which they produce. Hence employers have had to introduce their own examinations for recruitment. In the event, the worst sufferers are thousands of students and their parents and guardians.

4. The University Grants Commission takes a serious view of these developments especially because it has statutory responsibility and stake in the maintenance of standards of teaching, research and examinations. While reiterating its support for long-term perspectives of examination reforms as spelt out in 'Examination Reforms — A Plan of Action', the Commission would suggest the following urgent measures for implementation by each and every university. These measures do not involve any change in Acts, Statutes or Ordinances and as such it is expected that universities would implement the various measures with immediate effect and latest by the beginning of the academic session 1982-83.

(a) Syllabus/Question-Paper

(i) The syllabus in each paper should be demarcated into well-defined units/areas of content along with a topicwise breakdown. The units may be numbered.

(ii) Examiners should be free to repeat questions set in previous examinations. This is necessary in order to ensure that students do not leave out important portions of the syllabus. Instructions to paper-setters should be amended accordingly.

(iii) There is often a very wide choice given to students for answering question, say 5 out of 10. Such overall choice restricts the area of knowledge with which a student can pass an examination and is therefore undesirable. If there is choice, it may be provided by alternate questions in each unit of the syllabus.

(iv) No examination should be held without fulfilling the requirement of a minimum number of lectures/tutorials/laboratory sessions etc. which should be clearly laid down by the university.

(b) Conduct of examinations

In order to enable university authorities to conduct examinations in a fair and impartial manner, the Commission would explore the possibility of the enactment of suitable legislation to make cheating in examinations a cognizable offence and to provide the necessary administrative support to check malpractices. In the meantime, universities must take all steps for the proper conduct of examinations such as effective security measures, proper supervision and invigilation cordoning off the

examination centres from the range of loud-speakers and other interference, flying squads and stern action in all cases involving copying and use of unfair means.

5. The University Grants Commission attaches such great importance to the above measures and to their implementation that it has decided to continuously monitor the programme. In pursuance of the above, the Commission would (a) collect syllabi, question-papers, answer-books on random sampling basis, information regarding number of teaching days etc., (b) collect information regarding steps taken by the universities for the proper conduct of examinations, (c) link developmental assistance (specially for quality improvement programme) with the effective implementation of the suggested measures and (d) explore the possibility of holding national-level examinations for the award of fellowships, research associateships etc.

6. It is the earnest hope of the University Grants Commission that universities would implement the minimum examination reform programme in the spirit in which it has been formulated and would regard examinations not merely a tool of evaluation but as a means of promoting better education which implies improved teaching-learning progresses, promotion of study habits, greater use of library and laboratory facilities and continuing interaction between teachers and students.

Reproduced from a UGC document issued in December 1982.



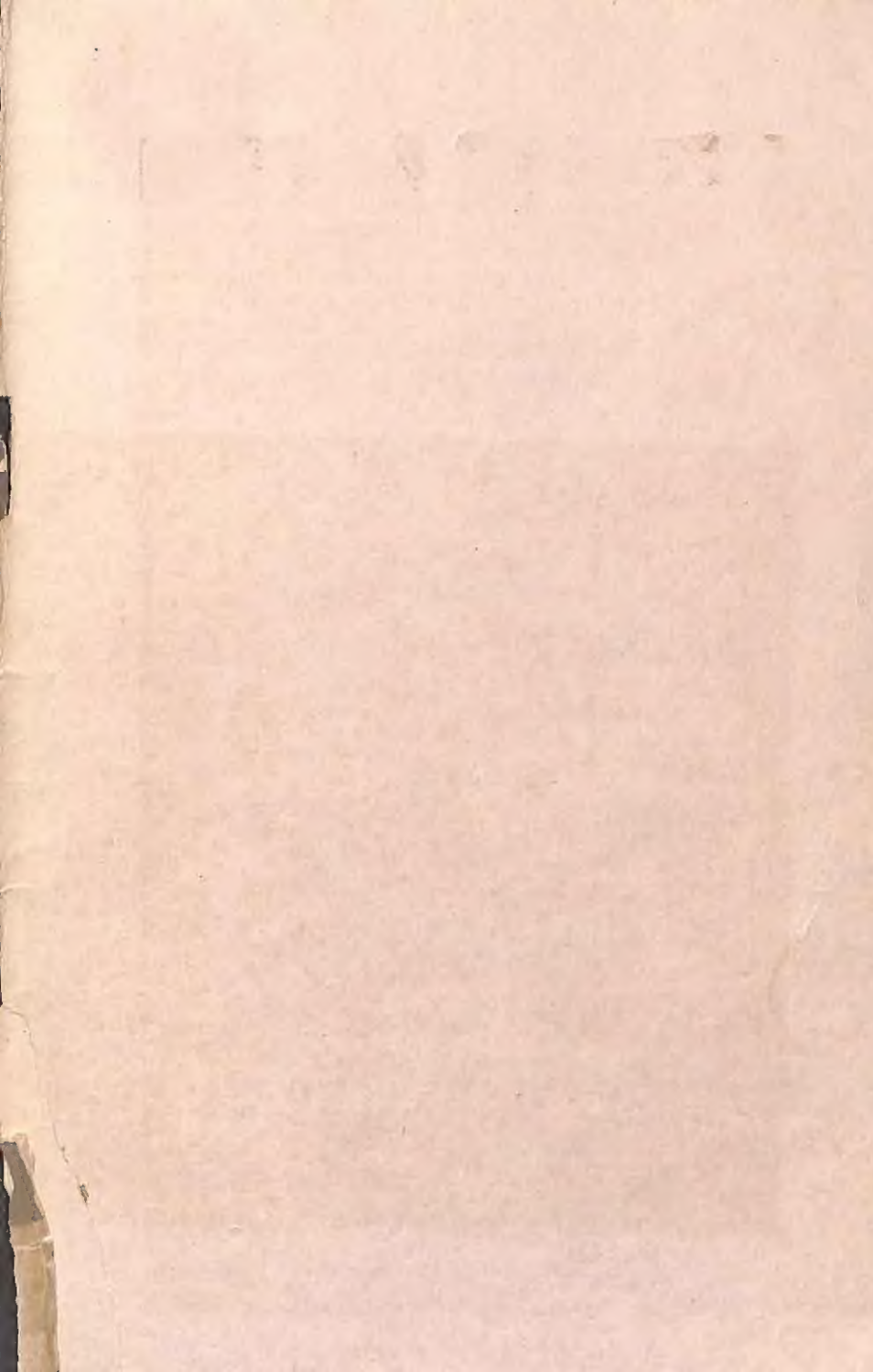
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This short but pithy work is based on three lectures delivered by Dr. Amrik Singh at Banaras Hindu University. The examination system in India, particularly at the university level discussed by the author, has been a source of despair not only to students but also educationalists for several decades. In critically discussing the various attempts made and ideas put forward to improve the system, the author not only makes several constructive suggestions but also identifies the real problems that should be tackled and which have too often been ignored.

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